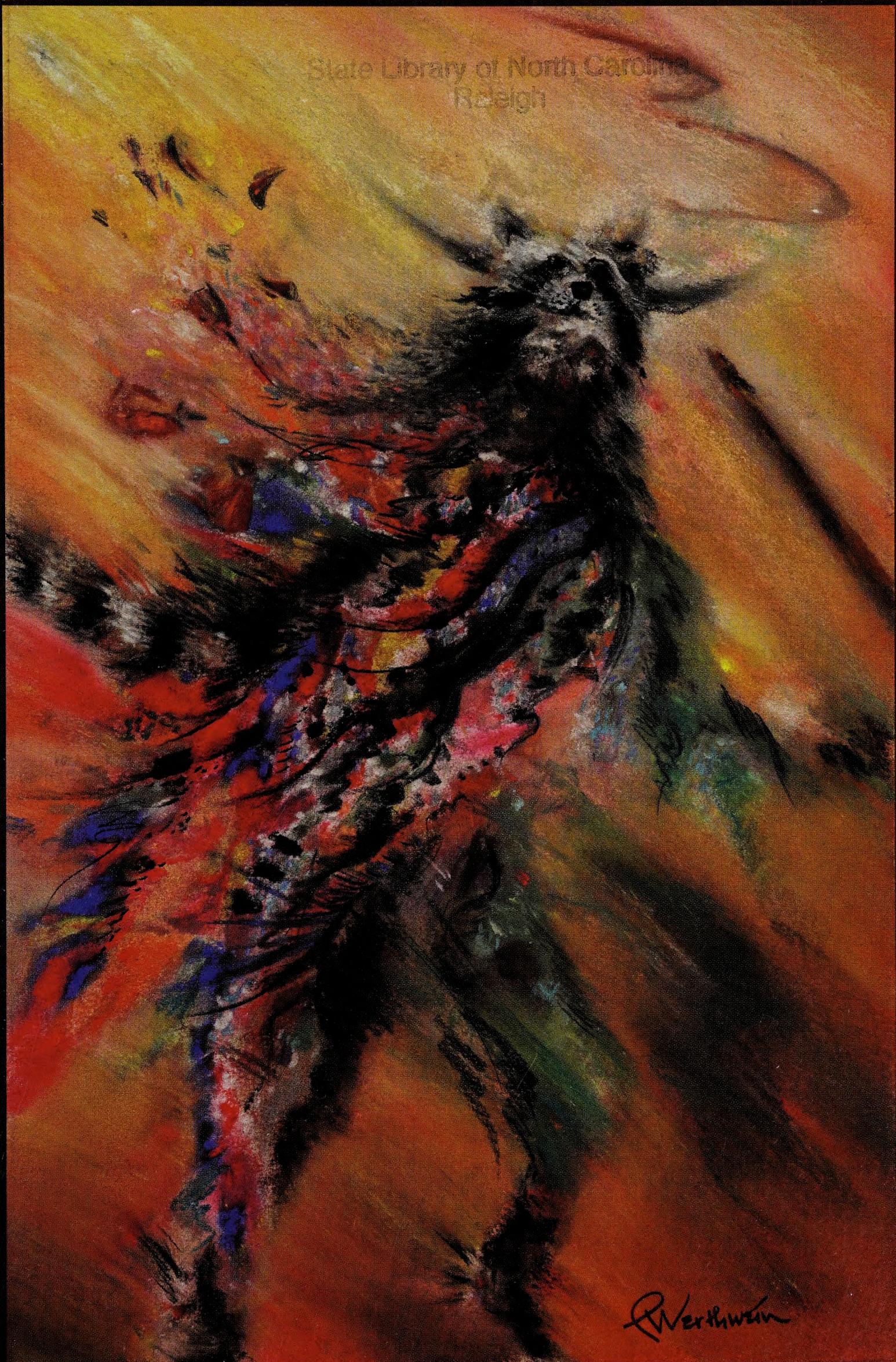


North Carolina

47.2 Midwinter 2000

Folklore Journal



State Library of North Carolina
Raleigh

Folklore Journal

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The North Carolina Folklore Journal is published twice a year by the North Carolina Folklore Society with the assistance of East Carolina University and a grant from the North Carolina Arts Council, a state agency.

Membership in the North Carolina Folklore Society includes subscriptions to the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* and the *Newsletter of the North Carolina Folklore Society*. Dues are \$12.00, individual; \$15.00, institution; \$8.00, student; \$15.00, overseas/foreign; \$200.00, life.

Available special issues include *The North Carolina Coastal Folklife Survey* (\$4.00) and *A Treasury of Tar Heel Folk Artists: The North Carolina Folk Heritage Award 1989-1996* (\$6.00). Other past issues of NCFJ are also available. North Carolina residents, add 6% sales tax on past issue orders. See the NCFS Website [<http://www1.appstate.edu/~ncfolk/>] for membership/dues information and available past issues, or write Lucy Allen, Secretary-Treasurer, North Carolina Folklore Society, c/o Hiddenite Center, Hiddenite, NC 28636.

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ISSN #0090-5844

Cover: *John Kooner* by Linda Werthwein

Carolina Roots – Reminiscence with Reason

– Karen Baldwin

My Carolina roots grow out of undergraduate days at Guilford College, beginning in September, 1961, on the western outskirts of Greensboro, a time and place of struggle and change. The Civil Rights Movement was beginning to overcome the complacent inertia of segregation. Brave black young folks held the first “sit-ins” at the Woolworth’s downtown. Extracurricular activities for Guilfordians and students from historically black A&T and Bennett colleges included picketing at movie theaters with segregated seating and manouvers to challenge “whites only” service at cafeteria restaurants. White students entered first, filling the admission area between the door and the cashier’s window. Then black students moved through the line up to the cashier to attempt to enter. We all were refused. Police arrived, advised us we were in violation of some unlawful assembly or fire ordinance, and gave us time to leave before they arrested those who stayed behind that day to be jailed.

Guilford, founded and run by Quakers since 1837, had its own struggles in those 1960s days of citizen actions against segregation. The college was not integrated, a fact pointedly noted by the local NAACP chapter. One graduate student in religion, a man of an African nationality, did not, by his presence, constitute an integrated campus. Then, too, codes of behavior for Guilford women and men students were regulated differentially. Conscientious efforts for change were needed in many directions.

In those same soft Carolina days I “discovered” folk roots in the music of Joan Baez and Odetta and in the autobiographical writings of expatriated author James Baldwin. Details vary, but my story is similar to many whose “calling” to folklore comes from the 1960s. We came marching and singing the songs of the Civil Rights Movement, carrying “acoustic” guitars on our backs. Folks are still singing, still marching along.

Nearly forty years away in time from that ’61 September, I returned to Guilford’s Dana Auditorium for the second in a series of three “Carolina Roots” concerts, sponsored in part by the NC Arts Council. “Many Voices of Praise,” a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration, honored “the gospel music traditions shared by African and European Americans in the south.” Performers included an a cappella quartet of North Carolina Folk Heritage Award winners—Joe Thompson, the Badgett Sisters, and John Dee Holeman; the Wilson Brothers, a vocal and instrumental ensemble from Murphy; and the Gospel Gems, a group of African and European American singers and musicians from the Boone Mennonite Brethren Church.



The quartet sang songs remembered from childhood; slow, stately rhythms reinforced the pleasure and dignity of their sacred, musical reminiscences. Folk Heritage Award winners Jerry and Ray Wilson, and an instrumental ensemble, played gospel that incorporated close harmonies in unison and intricate instrumental blendings of the bluegrass music from their Cherokee and Clay county communities. The Gospel Gems, from a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Boone, blended voices singing from African and European heritages in gospel praise. The audience of students and community members clapped to join the performers' rhythms and were enthusiastically on their feet, applauding, at the program's close.

Much was different, much is the same. Guilford's campus in 2001 is very much the one I walked with my classmates in 1961. We had no state arts council, then, though, no public radio stations or a National Endowment for the Arts, and certainly no Guilford College Old Time String Band Preservation Society. Much of the awareness of and advocacy for folk arts and artists we depend on now was seeded in the songs of the Civil Rights Movement and in the social and cultural interchanges fostered there. We've come a long way; we have many more ways to go.

My reminiscence bears meaning for understanding the contexts in which we appreciate our own and others' folk cultural lives. Themes of retention, revival, renewal, and respectful reference to historical contexts draw together seemingly disparate subjects in this issue of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*.

African influences in the state's architecture is historian Alice Eley Jones's research realm. Artist Linda Werthwein rendered the cover art, "John Kooner," from historic descriptions and paired her drawing with an essay considering the African and Caribbean roots for this North Carolina midwinter masquerade, a customary confrontation of established power structures, a "misrule." This midwinter, Tryon Palace reenacted a Jonkonnu masquerade as part of Christmas celebrations. Richard Walser's reprinted article on John Kuner, serves well to inform revival interest in and performance of Jonkonnu at historic sites such as Somerset Place and Tryon Palace.

Two student prize essays deal with retention and renewal in quite different areas of cultural performance. Laura Sutton documents the current contexts for one legend site of the "Vanishing Hitchhiker." Sarah Reuning writes about the continuity of expression shared by generations of wearers of the same family wedding dress. Brown-Hudson and Community Traditions Award citations take note of people whose occupations and music consciously respect and draw from the past, at the same time this reverence for the "old ways" is renewed in and by current issues and conditions.

We have roots; we have wings.

West African Spiritualism in North Carolina's Buildings and Crafts - Alice Eley Jones

The enslaved West Africans who helped to construct the manor houses, slave quarters, municipal buildings, outbuildings, and other structures in North Carolina came from cultures that possessed very old building and crafting traditions. As with traditions in other Old World cultures, certain precautions had to be taken to ensure protection from the many harmful spirits that could possibly be found living in one's home.

In the symbol systems of many cultures, a house is expressed as an enclosed space and also as a receptacle, which, like the chest and the womb, is female in character. As a secret enclosure it also symbolizes the repository of all wisdom. Within the home, fire symbolizes the soul of the family and the sense of domestic continuity. The threshold or doorway serves as the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds. The walls also symbolize protection from the forces outside the home. The orientation of a building to the sun was of immense symbolic importance. Structures with entrances that faced east or west were in most demand.

Although a house may be protected by magical and religious rites from the assaults of external spirit forces, the house is also, paradoxically, the abode of domestic spirit elements that have common features: they are capricious, troublesome, hard to please, and even spiteful. But it is in matters connected with death that the magic of the house is most apparent. When one member of the family is due to pass over, according to West African tradition, the family ghosts discretely return to await reunion with the newly departed.

Little of the potent magic of the building and craft trades of traditional West Africa survived in the modern world. Over the years the African adopted and maintained the building traditions of Europeans. In several North Carolina structures, however, examples of West African building folklore have been discovered. West African



spiritualism was a vital component of a slave's personal history and character. It is also the least studied and the most misunderstood.

West African Spiritualism

In addition to their tangible skills, African builders brought with them religious and/or spiritual aspects of their cultures that were related to building traditions. The work of craftsmen and decorative artisans, as well as builders, was influenced by these same belief systems. Africans have a belief system founded in the spirit world as it relates to the earth and the buildings humans construct.

Through a world that encompassed the dead, the living, and the yet unborn, wound the spiritual path every traditional African walked. The journey was preordained and began before birth. It was a matter of fate. Life was to be lived in the here and now. There was no hope for a future or a better life. Heaven was not hoped for nor hell feared in the hereafter. The African was the center of his religion, with a singular power to bless, curse, and honor the ancestors.

80 In traditional religions there were no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds were written in the hearts of individuals, and each African was himself a living creed of his own religion. Where the individual was, there was his religion, for he was a religious being. His journey began before birth and continued after death.

Traditional religions had no missionaries to propagate them, and one individual did not preach his religion to another. There was no conversion from one traditional religion to another. Each society had its own religious system, and the propagation of such a complete system would have involved propagating the entire life of the people concerned.

What Africans did was motivated by what they believed, and what they believed sprang from what they did and experienced. Belief and action in African traditional society could not be separated; they constituted a whole.

Initiation rites were important vehicles for West African spiritualism. Children were born both physically and religiously. The rites of birth and childhood introduced the child to the corporate community, but this was only an introduction. The child was considered a passive being and still had a long way to go before being confirmed as an adult. He grew out of childhood and entered adulthood physically, socially, and spiritually. This was also a change from passive to active membership in



the community. Most African people had rites and ceremonies to mark this great change, but a few did not observe initiation and puberty rites. The initiation of the young was one of the key moments in the rhythm of individual life, which is also the rhythm of the corporate group in which what happened to the single youth happened corporately to the parents, the relatives, the neighbors, and the living-dead (ancestors).

Initiation rites have many symbolic meanings, in addition to their physical drama and impact. Young people are ritually introduced to the art of communal living. This happens when they withdraw from other people to live alone in the forest in specifically prepared dwellings away from the villages. They go through a period of withdrawal from society, an absence from home during which time they receive secret instruction before they are allowed to rejoin their relatives at home. This is a symbolic experience of the process of dying, living in the spirit world, and being reborn. The rebirth, that is the act of rejoining their families, emphasizes and dramatizes that the young people are now new, they have new personalities, they have lost their childhood, and in some societies they receive completely new names.

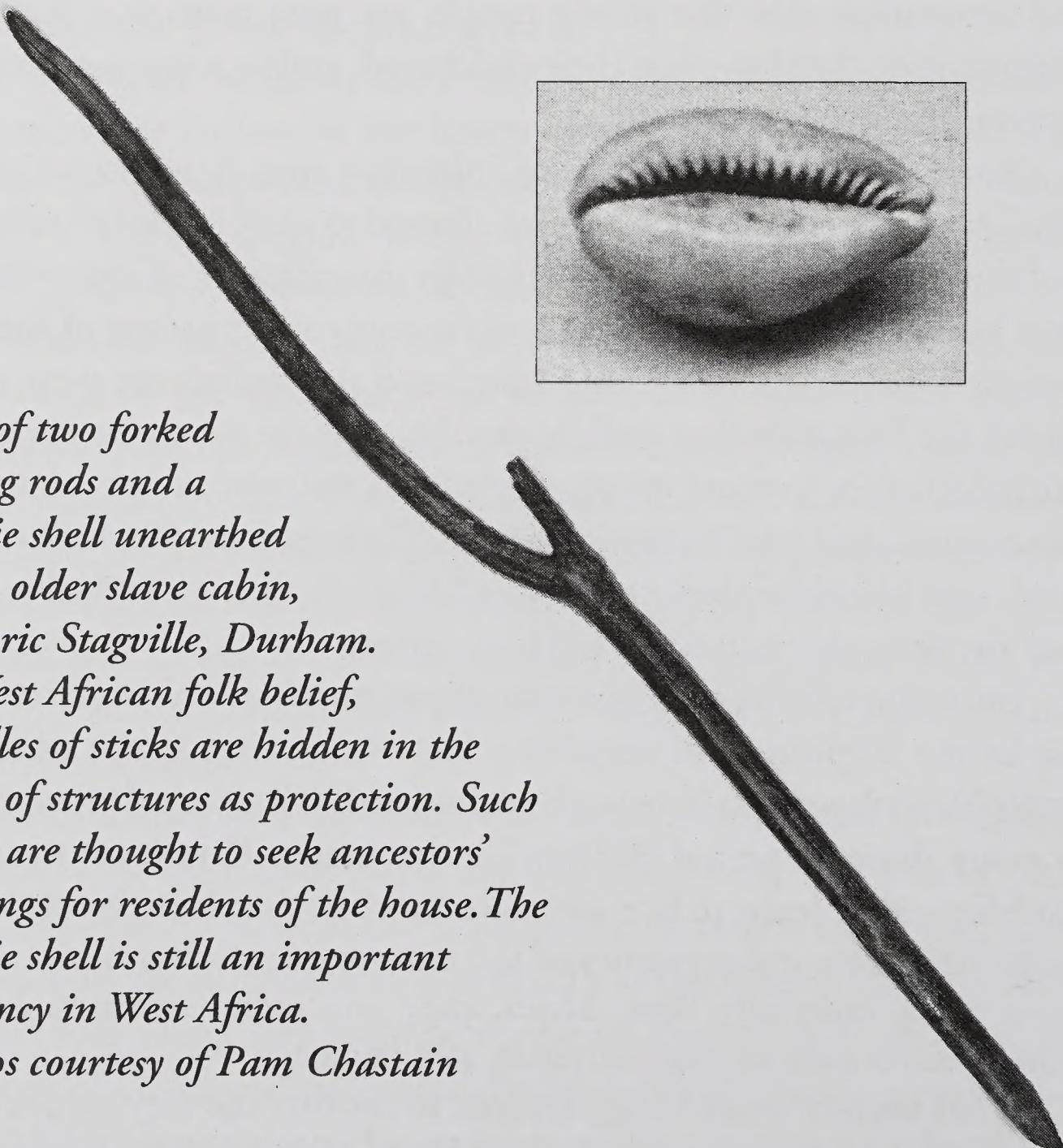
Another great significance of initiation rites is to introduce the candidates to adult life: they are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. They enter into the state of responsibility: they inherit new rights, and new obligations are expected of them by society. This incorporation into adulthood also introduces them to the life of the living-dead as well as the life of those yet to be born. The initiation rites prepare young people in matters of sex, marriage, procreation, and family responsibilities. They are henceforth allowed to shed their blood for their country and to plant their biological seeds so that the next generation can begin to arrive.

Initiation rites have a great educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge that is not otherwise accessible to those who have not been initiated. It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationship, and in some areas, especially West Africa, they join secret societies, each of which has its own secrets, activities, and language.

It has become increasingly evident to me that the very nature of the slave trade ensured the retention of West African spiritualism in the



New World. Chattel slavery was a labor-intensive enterprise that depended upon youthful and strong African boys and men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five. The same could be said for female captives, although females generally did not fill the holds of slave ships, as did the vast numbers of male captives. However, slave ships did transport huge numbers of initiated men and women to the New World, men and women who understood the spiritual dangers of being separated from the living-dead and the yet unborn. Their separation from their ancestral land was therefore a separation of the physical as well as the spiritual. The adult African who was enslaved without benefit of rites of passage was forever a child and unworthy of any rights of adulthood. The collective memories of creating sacred places and holy ground were simply transported to the New World by initiated men and women, and in the New World, the initiated began to create a landscape of religious secrets, symbols, and ceremonies.



*One of two forked
diving rods and a
cowrie shell unearthed
in an older slave cabin,
Historic Stagville, Durham.
In West African folk belief,
bundles of sticks are hidden in the
walls of structures as protection. Such
sticks are thought to seek ancestors'
blessings for residents of the house. The
cowrie shell is still an important
currency in West Africa.
Photos courtesy of Pam Chastain*



This research is a continuation of the research contained in my 1986 graduate thesis "Afro-American Cultural Traditions of Stagville and Fairntosh Plantations" at North Carolina Central University. As a two-time Stagville Fellow (1985,1986) at Historic Stagville in Durham, I felt compelled to research and write about the rare examples of material culture unearthed at the site.

As a result of these efforts, the information on African spiritualism has formed the basis for several publications. The pieces of material culture were first highlighted by me in the Historic Stagville brochure, *The African American Community at Stagville*. In 1991 The Museum of the Confederacy's *Before Freedom Came* included Stagville research. The 1998 publication *Keep Your Head to the Sky - Interpreting African American Homeground*, included a chapter written by me tracing my graduate research of the cowrie shell, medicine stick, and divining rods, "Sacred Places and Holy Ground: West African Spiritualism at Stagville Plantation."

Preservation/North Carolina commissioned me to curate their two-part exhibit, *African American Builders and Architects in North Carolina*, in which the "Building Folkways" panel is almost exclusively devoted to the aforementioned pieces of material culture. However, the research for this Preservation/North Carolina project yielded further examples of West African building folkways. As the 1998 exhibit continues to be shown in museums throughout the state, interest in building folkways increases. This article was first presented as part of the series, "Interpreting Slavery in the Plantation South," funded by the School of Library and Information Sciences, North Carolina Central University in 1999 at Historic Hope Plantation, Windsor.

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Builders and Artisans

In his 1980 *Southern Exposure* article on black builders in the South, Peter Wood discusses the European influences on African American craftsmen.

Often slave craftsmen have been portrayed as the most thoroughly assimilated of Afro-Americans, the persons who accommodated most completely to the tools, techniques and aesthetics of Caucasian masters. Undeniably, most black artisans were obliged to follow the instructions, suit the tastes, and line the pockets of whites, so much of their work conformed to European values. (Wood 5)



[T]he creation of material objects—dishes, baskets, boats, houses—also allowed blacks to retain, assert, and even teach certain ancestral styles and values. In building, as in most areas of life, there were major constraints against direct “carryovers” from Africa to the South. Migrants came from a variety of backgrounds. Isolation, harsh working conditions, and limited resources made it hard to transplant fully the material culture of the Old countries. Once the U.S. slave trade was curtailed in the early nineteenth century, retaining Old World forms became even more implausible, as the refreshing influence of new arrivals from Africa disappeared. But evidence suggests that the Negro slaves who were required to build houses for whites, like the blacks obliged to cook English food or play European instruments, managed to bring their own methods and beliefs to the task. (Wood 6)

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The African slave brought the skills of ironworking and woodcarving and a proficiency in the use of earth and stone to the New World. His innovation in the application of these skills qualified him as an architect alongside many other early American craftsmen. Architectural characteristics such as steep hip roofs, wide overhanging roofs, central fireplaces, porches, earth and moss wall construction [wattle-and-daub or vegetable materials], and [the shotgun house] suggest that elements of African architecture may have been introduced by slave builders (Wood 8). I conclude that the use of certain geometric designs, African symbols, and the material evidence of folk beliefs are elements strongly indicating African origins.

Before a building of any type could be erected, it was necessary to propitiate the powers of nature, because the order of nature was being interfered with, and particularly the spirit of the earth on which the building was to rest. Through every stage of construction, from the initial selection of the site to the final completion of the roof, there followed a succession of magical rites (Phoebus 26).

In some African societies the belief that a house or other building must be protected against hostile presences that may wish to enter and harm the occupants required either the use of decorative ornaments or objects built into the very structure. From within the walls of West African structures a variety of spiritual symbols stood guard over the inhabitants.

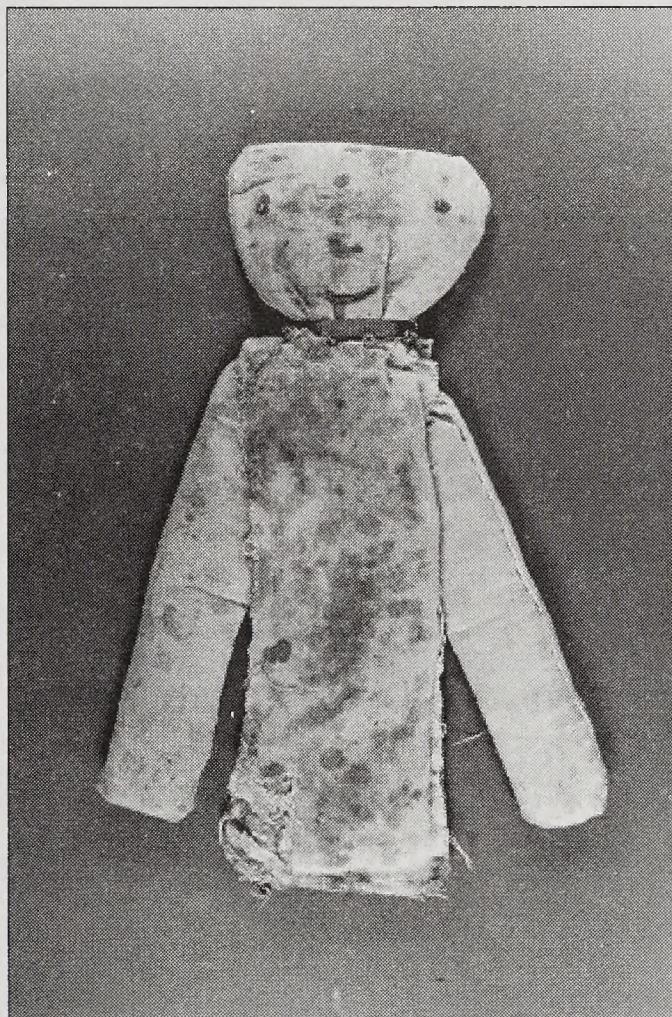


Historic Stagville-Durham County

In 1851, plantation slaves at Stagville plantation constructed four cabins at Horton Grove: built of half-timbers, resting on stone piles from the Eno, Little, and Flat rivers, and with walls filled with brick nogging. Between the brick wall (all plantation bricks were made by slaves) and the wooden mantle of the fireplace were discovered two divining rods—two smooth, pointed, forked sticks. The mortar gives evidence that the divining rods were probably placed between the mantle and wall at the time of construction. West African folk belief credits bundles of sticks hidden in walls of structures with protection from their ancestors. Additionally, such sticks are thought to seek the blessings of the ancestors for house members.

Cloth slave doll found in the Richard Bennehan House, Historic Stagville. The doll may have served to lay a curse on the household.

Photo courtesy of Historic Stagville, Division of Archives & History, NC Department of Cultural Resources



Medicine stick discovered in the Richard Bennehan House, Historic Stagville, may have been placed by a slave to lay a curse on the Bennehan family.

Photo courtesy of Pam Chastain





According to John S. Mbiti, in *African Religions and Philosophy* (1979),

In some societies family spirits have to be moved ceremoniously when the villagers move from one place to another. This ensures that the family spirits and especially the living dead, move with members of their human relatives and are not forsaken where there is nobody to remember them in their personal immortality.
 (qtd. in Jones "Afro-American Cultural Traditions..." 51)

The cowrie shell unearthed in an older Stagville slave cabin still is an important currency in West Africa. However, cowrie shells, which were introduced to Africa south of the Sahara from the Maldives of the Indian Ocean by Arab caravans, are also an important symbol in African divination. The cowrie shell is thought to afford protection over water in addition to protecting one's person and property. (Zaslavsky 70)

African scholars have classified many of these devices as talismans (or general good luck charms) and amulets (used to ward off specific evils) (Davidson 125). In practice, however, eclectic Africans used magical objects less by category than by what they actually seemed to do. Following are the most common African charms and their uses, according to Basil Davidson's *African Kingdoms* (125).

Pieces of Straw	Protects crops from harm
Palm-frond Archways	Shield village from disease
Bundles of Feathers	Guard occupants of a room
Raffia Brooms	Keep away burglars
Animal Carvings	Insure a good hunt
Animal Teeth	Keep off wild animals
Iron Bracelets	Promote fertility
Bundles of Sticks	Guard the house
Bamboo Whistles	Defend against witchcraft
Goatskin Pouches	Ward off illness
Chewing Sticks	Prevent quarrels
Heavy Anklets	Protect weak children
Twisted Copper Rings	Prevent snake bites
Nails in Wooden Objects	Good luck
Python	Reincarnated ancestor



The walls of a house could also become secret repositories for objects perhaps intended to place harm on household inhabitants (Jones, "Afro-American Cultural Traditions" 46-64). At Stagville, a medicine stick was discovered wedged between the 1787 one-story section and the 1799 two-story section of the Bennehan House. Staffs and medicine sticks were powerful African spiritual omens and the stick may have been placed by a slave to lay a curse on the Bennehan family.

A cloth doll discovered in the attic wall of the Bennehan House may not be a child's toy, but an omen of image spiritualism to perhaps again lay a curse on the household. Although simply identified as a slave doll, it is difficult to imagine how the doll could have been lost between the walls of the attic.

Franklin County

At Nutbush Farm in Franklin County, a great iron pot has stood near the back door ever since the plantation house was built in the late eighteenth century. According to local lore, each time one of the county's seven Perry brothers built a house, the other brothers would send what blacks they could spare to help build. These workers would set a pot amid the stones as they laid the foundation for the central part of the house. As they sweated throughout the day to raise the building, they would pray and preach and sing over the pot, "fashioning something of power from their own despair, moving in rhythm around the pot as in a ring shout; pouring emotions into the pot – then exhaustion. And the next day the pot was moved aside and the house was raised up" (Wood 6).

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The iron pot or cauldron has also played a role in the folk beliefs of slaves and their descendants as hundreds of ex-slaves have testified to the magical ability of iron pots to absorb the sounds of forbidden religious gatherings. What appears to have been lost is the value African people place on iron and metal objects. The strength of this belief may rest equally on their belief in the cauldron and the iron contained within the cauldron.

The African belief in the powers of iron is so strong that people believed the metal acted as a mode of communication between the worlds of the living and the dead. In Africa blacksmiths are both respected and despised. In areas where there is a culture based on iron, smiths are esteemed; but in pastoral civilizations, the skills of the smiths are despised (Phoebus 32).



The ritual observed at Nutbush Farm may be associated with the long-forgotten ceremony to Ogun, that originated in the Yoruba states of West Africa (Nigeria). One of the most powerful lesser gods in Yoruba is Ogun, the God of iron, who oversees all iron implements (Ashanti 146).

"Praise-chants for Ogun, ...illustrate his ambivalent nature; his power to destroy as well as to construct," according to Robert Farris Thompson (52).

[I]ron instruments are all, in the end, the children of Ogun, carried on his broad and mighty shoulders. He directs his energies to benefit those who earn his love through ties of kinship and those who make sacrifices and festivals in his name. The icons of Ogun are not, however, for the lazy or the irreverent. Ogun marches only with the spiritually vital and the quick of hand. (Thompson 57)

Somerset Plantation-Washington County

The door of the upper piazza of the Somerset manor house (thought to belong to an older plantation structure) is framed by geometric designs done in reed. Vegetable material used in combination with geometric designs raises the possibility of West African influences. Ashanti fetish houses have geometric designs carved in mud relief on doors for protection against evil spirits. The use of reed is not ordinarily a feature of European building traditions, but reed work has a long history in African craft and building traditions.

*Upper piazza door,
Somerset Place.*



Photo courtesy of Pam Chastain



*Thomas Day mantle,
Caswell County*

Thomas Day-Caswell County

Thomas Day was born in Virginia about 1801 to a free black mother. By 1827 he had established a prospering cabinet-making business in Milton, Caswell County, North Carolina. In 1830, when Day married Aquilla Wilson, also a free black from Halifax County, Virginia, his white customers petitioned the North Carolina General Assembly to pass a special act to allow his wife to join him. An 1827 North Carolina law barred free blacks from entering the state.

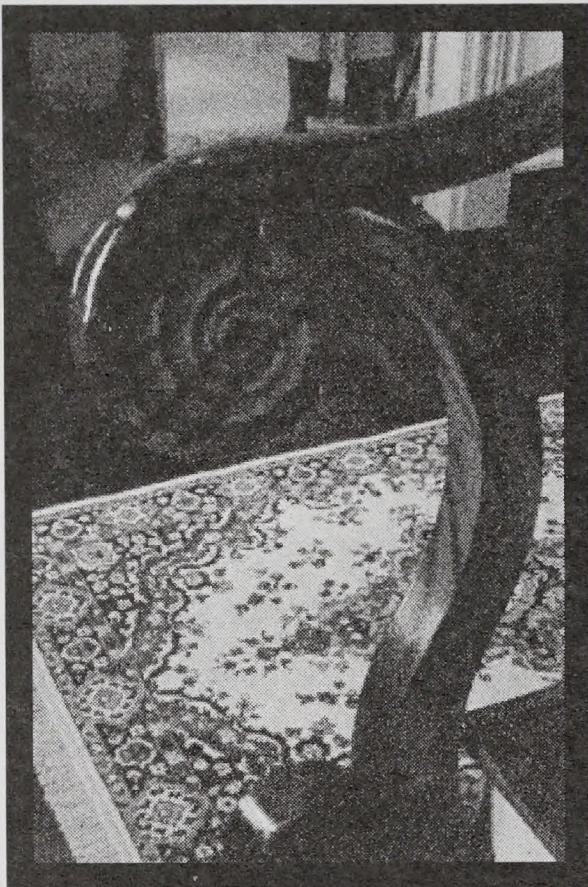
Day trained white apprentices and owned slaves—two in 1830 and six in 1850. In 1848 he purchased the Union Tavern, one of Milton's largest buildings, to serve as his home and workshop. He employed twelve workers.

For more than thirty years he maintained a successful business, making furniture and providing architectural interiors for homes, churches, and public buildings in North Carolina and Virginia. Day died in 1861 (*Jones African American Builders...*).

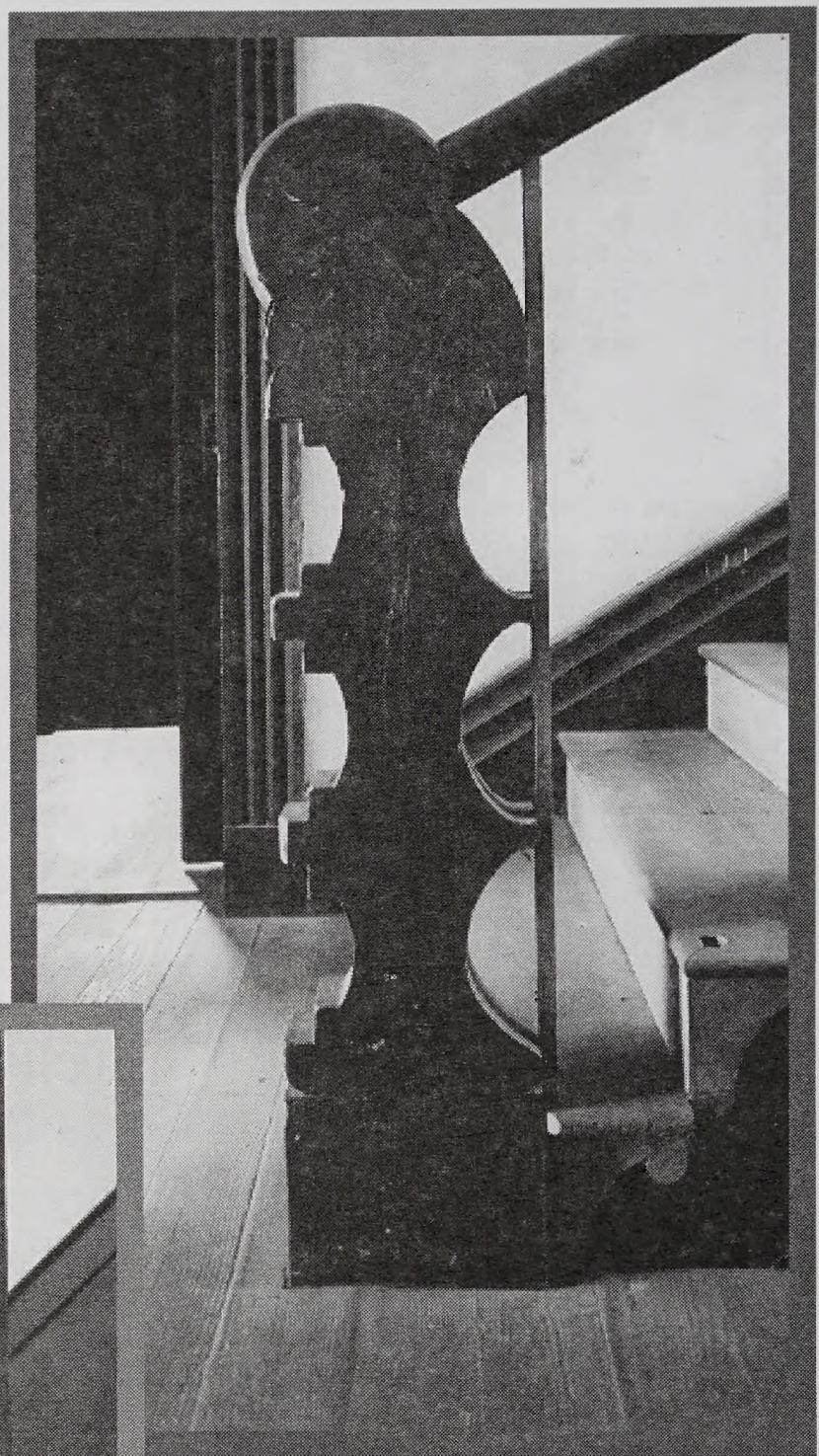
The role of the wood carver in African society was sacred. Although Thomas Day probably never saw an African sculpture, as a member of the African American community, he would have been privy to folkways and beliefs of wood carvers whose craft demonstrated spiritual power and skill.

The pair of faces he carved in the 1850s for a mantle in Caswell County perhaps speak to his powers and beliefs. Day also carved a serpent-like newel post in the Bartlett-Yancy house in Milton. Serpents are used to represent the ancestors.

In the Paschal House in Milton, Day carved a newel post that resembles a statue with a large head. A main focus of the presentation of ideal character in Yoruba art is the human head, magnified and carefully enhanced by detailed coiffure or headgear, according to Robert Farris Thompson (11).



Thomas Day newel posts



*Snail newel post (above left),
may symbolize continuous
growth. Alice Eley Jones photo.*

*Newel post figure with
coiffure or headgear (above).*

*Serpentine newel post (left).
Serpents may represent the
ancestors.*

*Photos above and left courtesy of
Division of Archives & History, NC
Department of Cultural Resources*



The coiffure or headgear "... is the bird which, according to the Yoruba, God places in the head of man or woman at birth as the emblem of the mind..." (Thompson 11).

The snail-like newel post at Woodside plantation may speak to the African symbolism of a spiraling snail shell representing continuous growth. Day may have seen old men with walking sticks adorned with relief carvings of serpents, fowl, heads, faces, and animals—symbols of their status within the community. Such walking or medicine sticks represented power to their owners as well as their carvers.

Two Thomas Day woodcarvings, stunning by their design and execution of carving skill, appear to contain Adinkra symbolism. Adinkra constitutes a "system" of verbal and visual imagery whose symbols are figurative and stylized geometric images that embody poetic messages, proverbs, or aphorisms. Some of the symbols express the legendary history of the Akan people, and others are cultural metaphors and aphorisms about myths, legends, beliefs, and rituals. They contain multi-layered and profound truths. They provide a framework of moral virtues and lessons for the good life. They epitomize the Akan worldview and quest for truth and righteousness in the world (Willis 5-31).

The Akan people comprise an ethnic group of Ghana. They share a similar language, origin, traditions, and culture. Ghana has nearly one hundred ethnic groups speaking over forty-six indigenous languages in a large number of dialects. The country has also attracted immigrants from all countries in West Africa so that every West African ethnic group can be found among the Ghanian population (Willis 8). Kwa is one of the subdivisions of the Niger-Congo family of languages and Kwa languages are spoken by inhabitants of an area extending along the Atlantic Coast from eastern Liberia down through Nigeria. This area includes the southern parts of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and parts of Nigeria. Languages included among the Kwa group are Yoruba, Igbo, Twi, Fante, and Ewe (Willis 270). Anywhere in this region perhaps is the ancestral home of the person who taught Thomas Day to carve wood.

The handsome secretary carved by Day may contain the Adinkra symbol, Sankofa, which literally means, "Go back to fetch it." Sankofa is the symbol of the wisdom of learning from the past to build for the future. Sankofa is a constant reminder that past experience must be a guide for the future—learn from or build on the past (Willis 188).

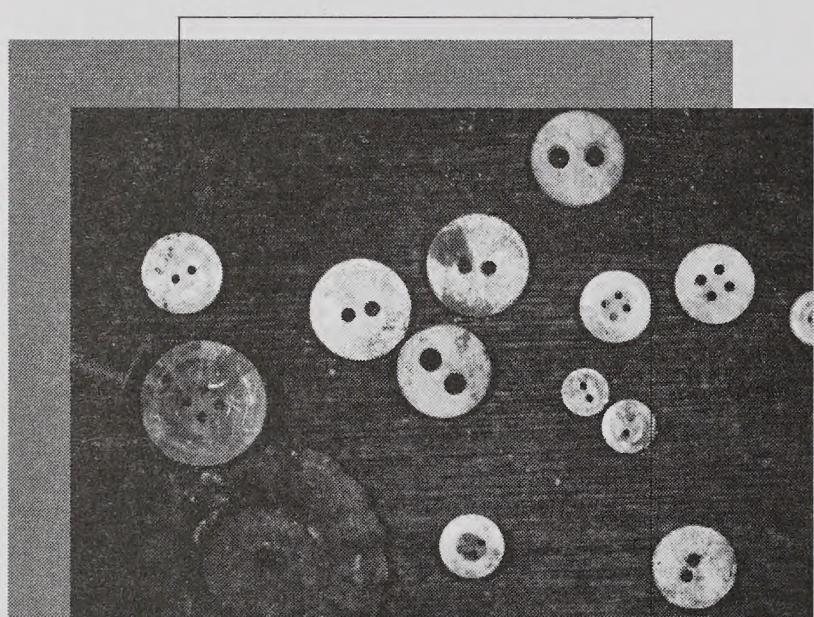


The geometric newel post of a Caswell County plantation house may include another Adinkra symbol, Twistings. This is a symbol of toughness, adaptability, selfless devotion to service, and an ability to withstand hardships and difficulties. Twistings refers to changing one's self, playing many roles (Willis 148).

The pair of carved faces in the mantle could easily be an ancestor totem or perhaps a guardian figure. The pensive expression is found often on guardian figures. The vaulted archways above the head are additional symbols of protection in West African building tradition.

Bellamy Mansion-Wilmington

Buttons discovered in 1998 beneath the floorboards of the hearth in the 1859 Bellamy Mansion slave house may have been placed there by its black builders to provide good fortune and protection. Underneath the foundation of the Bellamy Mansion carriage house the skeletal head of a cow has also been unearthed (Jones *African American Builders...*).



Buttons found under the floor of a slave house may have been left to bring good fortune.

Photo courtesy of Pam Chastain

The great importance cattle assumed in African societies is called the cattle complex, which Jan Vansina discusses in *The Horizon History of Africa*. Historically, the complex originated in East Africa. Cattle were not sacred animals as in India, but there was an intimate bond between cattle and people. Men had their favorite steer or ox and identified with the animal even more so than some Western people do with their pets.

Cattle were considered the most beautiful creatures of nature and much of the poetry in East Africa and southern Africa describes the beauty of the hides, horns, and behavior of herds or individual beasts. Cattle were also intermediaries between man and spirits. When an ox was sacrificed, one often told the animal before it was killed what to say to the ancestors in the next world. Cattle produced wealth for their owners by producing offspring or by being hired out as work animals.

Two Adinkra symbols, Sankofa (right) and Nkyinkyin (page 92) from W. Bruce Willis, The Adinkra Dictionary (Washington, DC: The Pyramid Complex, 1998, 188 & 148.)



Adinkra symbol, Sankofa, means "Go back to fetch it." Thomas Day secretary (below) perhaps features Sankofa as a design element.

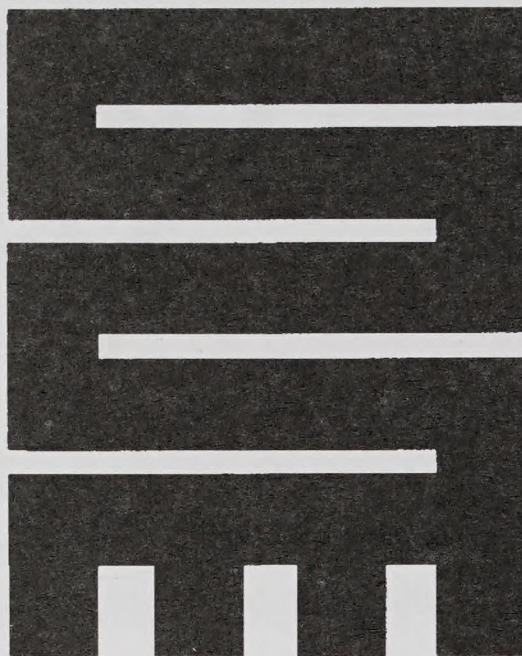
In addition, men could be vassals of a lord simply because they were entrusted with his herds. There is no aspect of African life in which cattle did not figure prominently (261-303).

Very little is written of the potent magic of ancient building traditions. In a nation of many cultures, there are building traditions, some more familiar than others.

The South in general and North Carolina in particular owe much to the African American with regard to their respective built environments. For those who recognize them, the African characteristics are obvious, but the building magic traditions are often misinterpreted or go unnoticed altogether by those unaware of their African origins. The building lore of West Africa may have become part and parcel of Southern building traditions with no awareness on the part of whites.

Photo courtesy of Pam Chastain





Old World Africans chose to create sacred places and holy ground in the New World as symbols of spiritual power and control. Had the slaveholder been able to control the spiritual aspect of the African's life completely, the dominion over his human property would have made the African truly docile. When time and opportunity presented themselves, sacred symbols

and signs became part of who Africans were in North Carolina. For the most part, their meanings are now faded from traditional folk history. However, African American homes and yards abound with African characteristic expressions that speak, knowingly and unknowingly, to the power and protection of the ancestors.

Removed from his ancestral home, the African nevertheless spoke to his spirits in his ironwork, woodcarving, weaving, pottery, and other crafts. In his architecture, secret societies, and the work of his hands the African has made the North Carolina landscape a holy and sacred place. Those born outside the traditions rarely learned the secrets. Those who are initiated rarely reveal them.

The Adinkra symbol for twistings (above) may be culturally resonant in the Caswell County newel post by Thomas Day (right). Drawing by Alice Eley Jones



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Richard Walser's article, "His Worship, the John Kuner," is reprinted here to acknowledge a resurgence of interest in this midwinter masquerade tradition. The illustration below originally appeared on page 163 of the article. Reprinted from *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, 19.4 (1971): 160-172.

STATE Magazine, December 10, 1960



—Jean Patterson Simon

Christmas at Somerset Place

His Worship, the John Kuner

-Richard Walser

In December, 1969, I was vacationing at Nisbett's Plantation, a country inn on the island of Nevis in the West Indies. Nevis is noted primarily as the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton in 1757 and the locality where Horatio Nelson courted his wife and was married in 1787. Today the small English-speaking island, former colony of Great Britain, is inhabited almost entirely by blacks. It has deserted beaches and high mountains, very little agriculture or business.

Christmas was quiet. Then on the following morning—Boxing Day, of course—guests at Nisbett's heard quite a racket from the circular driveway in front of the old plantation house. Groups of blacks were gathered there in holiday costume. Young folk were dressed up as soldiers and Red Cross nurses. A few eschewed prescribed uniforms, and had garbed themselves outlandishly in rags and ribbons. Some of the merrymakers wore masks. The frolickers marched about, they sang, they danced. Often two groups performed at the same time. Hats and baskets were passed for coins. In a half hour the commotion was over, and the revelers got into trucks heading towards Charlestown, the tiny capitol of Nevis. I stood there, thinking about the John Kuners of nineteenth-century North Carolina.

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With other tourists, I too was soon on my way to Charlestown. At the cricket grounds, there must have been a thousand performers, and almost as many spectators. Groups of cowboys and Indians, Mexicans and Vikings, savages with colorfully painted bodies, others of no obvious category—some marching and dancing before the grandstand, others waiting impatiently for their turn—it was a sight to see. For me the most singularly costumed were the men and boys wearing enormous crowns of brilliant peacock feathers. Here at the Charlestown cricket grounds, the folk festival was organized and controlled by the Nevis Jaycees, who offered prizes for winners in various events. I purchased a



“Souvenir [sic] Programme” of the “Nevis Christmas Festival” (which I have before me now as I write) and followed the events as best as I could.

(See *The Bonus of Redonda* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967], a juvenile novel by Roger D. Abrahams which has [pp.118-28, 136-42] several episodes about Christmastime on Nevis. The author is a Philadelphia lawyer, whose vacation home on Nevis contains a private Lord Nelson museum. When I drove over to get his autograph for my copy of *The Bonus of Redonda*, he told me about the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to his house and museum.)

Never once on Nevis did I hear the expression John Kuner mentioned. Though unable to prove anything, I nevertheless sensed a connection with the North Carolina custom. John Kuner was known in Jamaica and the Bahamas, also English-speaking, so why not in Nevis? The notion still plagues me, but no matter.

In antebellum North Carolina, John Kuner was quite a figure at Christmas, especially in the counties bordering Albemarle Sound and in the lower Cape Fear River region. He was not, as has sometimes been thought, confined to Wilmington, where, according to *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* (I, 240), “on Christmas Eve, John Kuners, Negroes, went about singing, dressed in tatters with strips of gay colors sewn to their garments. All were men, but some dressed as women. They wore masks. Some rattled beef ribs; others had cow horns, triangles, Jew’s-harps. They collected pennies at each house.” This entry, taken from Paul Green’s contributions to the *Collection*, acknowledges that the “custom resembles that reported from the Bahamas.”

If one may draw conclusions from the few first-hand accounts in North Carolina, the John Kuner ceremony was similar in all areas. Regardless of how the custom arrived in the state—and it seems not to have been practiced in any other section of the country—it flourished as a result of the leniency which slave-owners allowed their charges during the Christmas season. In 1824, Dr. James Norcum of Edenton wrote that at Christmas, slaves had “comparative freedom,” that they had “dances & entertainments among themselves,” and that drunkenness was only “too common on these occasions” (quoted in *Ante-Bellum North Carolina* by Guion Griffis Johnson [Chapel Hill, 1937], pp. 552-53).

In 1849, George Higby Throop, a Northern schoolmaster at Scotch Hall plantation in Bertie County across the Chowan River from Edenton, was eyewitness to the John Kooner [sic] antics. It was explained to Throop that



"...The negroes have a custom here of dressing one of their number at Christmas in as many rags as he can well carry. He wears a mask, too, and sometimes a stuffed coon-skin above it, so arranged as to give him the appearance of being some seven or eight feet high. He goes through a variety of pranks, which you will have an opportunity to see by and by, and he is accompanied by a crowd of negroes, who make all the noise and music for his worship the John Kooner."...

Breakfast was announced, and we had barely left the table when a loud shout betokened the arrival of the hero of the Christmas frolic. We hastened to the door. As the negroes approached, one of the number was singing a quaint song, the only words of which that I could distinguish were those belonging to the chorus, "Blow dat horn ag'in!" One of them carried a rude deal box, over which a dried sheep-skin had been drawn and nailed, and on this, as if his salvation depended on it, the man was thumping with ear-splitting din. Beside him was another, who kept up a fierce rattle of castanets; another beat a jaw-bone of some horse departed this life; and still another had a clevis, which he beat with an iron bolt, thereby making a very tolerable substitute for a triangle. The chief mummer, or John Kooner, kept up, in the meantime, all conceivable distortions of body and limbs, while his followers pretended to provoke his ire by thrusting sticks between his legs. One of the party seemed to officiate as bear-leader, to direct the motions of the unknown chief mummer. They approached the piazza, knelt on the ground, and continued to sing, one of them improvising the words while the rest sang in chorus, "O! dear maussa! O! dear missus! Wish ye merry Christmas!" The expected dram was given them. A few pieces of silver were thrown from the piazza, and they left us, singing a roisterly song, the chorus of which was "By on de row!"

(*Bertie: Or, Life in the Old Field* by "Capt. Gregory Seaworthy," pseudonym for George Higby Throop [Philadelphia, 1851], pp.217-19.)

Another eyewitness wrote of what happened at Somerset Place, the large Josiah Collins plantation on Lake Phelps, across Albemarle Sound



from Scotch Hall and Edenton. It was about 1855 that this impressionable young man observed the custom of "John Koonering," followed by the slaves

notably on Christmas day. The *leading* character is the "ragman," whose "get-up" consists in a costume of rags, so arranged that one end of each hangs loose and dangles; two great ox horns, attached to the skin of a raccoon, which is drawn over the head and face, leaving apertures only for the eyes and mouth; sandals of the skin of some wild "varmint;" several cow or sheep bells or strings of dried goats' horns hanging about their shoulders, and so arranged as to jingle at every movement; and a short stick of seasoned wood, carried in his hands.

The *second* part is taken by the best looking darkey of the place, who wears no disguise, but is simply arrayed in what they call his "Sunday-go-to-meeting suit," and carries in his hand a small bowl or tin cup, while the other parts are appropriated by some half a dozen fellows, each arrayed fantastically in ribbons, rags, and feathers, and bearing between them several so-called musical instruments or "gumba boxes," which consist of wooden frames covered over with tanned sheep-skins. These are usually followed by a motley crowd of all ages, dressed in their ordinary working clothes which seemingly comes as a guard of honor to the performers.

Having thus given you an idea of the *characters* I will describe the *performance* as I first saw it at the "Lake." Coming up to the front door of the "great house," the musicians commenced to beat their gumba-boxes violently, while characters No. 1 and No. 2 entered upon a dance of the most extraordinary character—a combination of bodily contortions, flings, kicks, gyrations, and antics of every imaginable description, seemingly acting as partners, and yet each trying to excel the other in the variety and grotesqueness of his movements. At the same time No. 2 led off with a song of a strange, monotonous cadence, which seemed extemporized for the occasion, and to run somewhat in this wise:

"My massa am a white man, juba!
Old missus am a lady, juba!
De children am de honey-pods, juba! juba!"



Krismas come but once a year, juba!
Juba! juba! O, ye juba!

“De darkeys lubs de hoe-cake, juba!
Take de ‘quarter’ for to buy it, juba!
Fetch him long, you white folks, juba! juba!
Krismas come but once a year, juba!
Juba! juba! O, ye juba!”

while the whole crowd joined in the chorus, shouting and clapping their hands in the wildest glee. After singing a verse or two No. 2 moved up to the master, with his hat in one hand and a tin cup in the other, to receive the expected “quarter,” and, while making the lowest obeisance, shouted: “May de good Lord bless old massa and missus, and all de young massas, juba!” The “rag man” during this part of the performance continued his dancing, singing at the top of his voice the same refrain, and striking vigorously at the crowd, as first one and then another of its members attempted to tear off his “head gear” and to reveal his identity. And then the expected “quarter” having been jingled for some time in the tin cup, the performers moved on to visit in turn the young gentlemen’s colony, the tutor’s rooms, the parson’s study, the overseer’s house, and, finally, the quarters, to wind up with a grand jollification, in which all took part until they broke down and gave it up from sheer exhaustion. Except at the “Lake” and in Edenton, where it originated [sic] with the Collins’ negroes, I never witnessed this performance in America, and I was convinced from the first that it was of foreign origin, based on some festive ceremony which the negroes had inherited from their African ancestors.

(Edward Warren, *A Doctor’s Experiences in Three Continents* [Baltimore, 1885], pp. 200-03.)

A later writer, reminiscing on his youth during the 1860s and 1870s in Bertie County, called the John Kuners “Ragamuffins.” It was at Christmas that they “would invade the town [Windsor, the county seat]. Masked and disguised, they would cut up the most ridiculous antics, blow tin horns, beat the tom-toms and let loose the callithumps, setting the dogs to barking and greatly amusing the children” (Robert Watson Winston, *It’s a Far Cry* [New York, 1937], p. 51).



Meanwhile, down on the lower Cape Fear, the custom was practiced in town and country. In 1851, the editor of the *Wilmington Journal* (Dec. 26, p. 2/1) noted that he "should be much inclined to rejoice" at Christmas "were it not for the little and big niggers begging for quarters, and the 'noise and confusion' and the 'Kooners,' or however otherwise the word is spelled, and the fire-crackers, and all the other unnamed horrors and abominations." In 1859, the editor reported that Christmas was relatively quiet: "The Don Quixotes were not strong. A crowd on foot preceded by an ox team was quite amusing. John Kuner was feeble. ... There was...much firing of crackers, rockets, sarpients [sic], etc., and a good deal of cheering and shouting, but nothing worse, and as the night wore on even these ceased, and the town slept" (*Wilmington Journal*, December 29, 1859, p. 2/1).

Rebecca Cameron (1844-1936) of Hillsborough wrote of the antebellum Christmas festivities at Buchoi, her grandfather's rice plantation on the Cape Fear River. As the slaves ventured into the swamp to fell the Yule log, they "chanted a part of the 'Coonah' song":

Christmas comes but once a year,
Ho rang du rango!
Let everybody have a share,
Ho rang du rango!

At Buchoi, the second day after Christmas was set aside for the John Coonah ceremony:

Some time in the course of the morning an ebony herald, breathless with excitement, would project the announcement: "De John Coonahs comin'!" and away flew every pair of feet within nursery precincts.

There they come sure enough! A long, grotesque procession, winding slowly over the hill from the quarters; a dense body of men (the women took no part in it, save as spectators) dressed in the oddest, most fantastic garb, representing birds and beasts and men, ragged and tattered, until "ragged as a Coonah" was a common plantation simile; with stripes and tatters of all sorts of cloth, in which white and red flannel had a conspicuous part, sewed all over their clothes in tufts and fringes. They were, indeed, a marvelous spectacle. Rude imitations of animals' heads,

with and without horns, hid some faces; pasteboard masks covered some, while streaks and spots of red, white and yellow paint metamorphosed others, and immense beards of horse hair or Spanish moss, were plentiful.

The leader—for there seemed to be some regular organization among them, though I could never persuade any negro to explain it to me—was the most fantastic figure among them all. A gigantic pair of branching deer horns decorated his head; his arms, bare to the elbows, were hung with bracelets thickly set with jingling bells and metal rings; similar bells were fastened to the fringes of rags around his legs.

The banjo, the bones, triangles, castanets, fifes, drums and all manner of plantation musical instruments, accompanied the procession. One of the Coonahs, generally a small and very nimble man, dressed in woman's clothes, and though dancing with frantic zeal, never violated the proprieties supposed to be incumbent upon the wearer of skirts.

Once before the hall-door the leader snapped his whip with a crack like a pistol-shot. Everything stood still for an instant; we dared not draw a breath and could hear the tumultuous beating of our hearts as we pressed close to mammy or grandpa.

The awful stillness is broken by another resonant crack of the whip, and at the instant the whole medley of instruments began to play, and, with their first note, out into the open sprang the dancers. Those weird, grotesque, even hideous creatures embody the very ideal of joyous, harmonious movement. Faster and faster rings out the wild, barbaric melody; faster and faster falls the beat of the flying feet, never missing the time by the space of a midget's breath. One after the other of the dancers fall out of line, until only the woman and the leader are left to exhibit their best steps and movements.

About this time one of the dancers, a hideous travesty of a bear, snatches a hat off the head of the nearest pickaninny, and begins to go around to the "white folks" to gather the harvest of pennies with which every one is provided. All the while the dance was in progress the musical voice of the leader was chanting the Coonah song, the refrain of which was taken up by hundreds of voices.



As the wild chant draws to a close out of the hall door run a bevy of white children with laps and hats full of nuts, raisins, apples, oranges, cakes and candy, and scatter the whole among the crowd. Such a scramble as follows! The last fragment gathered up, all at once the leader cracks his whip, and whirls around with his face from the house, and the crowd marches to the next plantation.

(“Christmas at Buchoi, a North Carolina Rice Plantation,” *The North Carolina Booklet*, 13 (July, 1913), pp. 3, 8-10, with a note informing that the article was first published in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, Christmas, 1891. On p. 8, Miss Cameron attempts to account for the origin of the John Coonahs: “My impression is that the custom was introduced into South Carolina by the slaves who accompanied Governor Sir John Yeamans from the Barbadoes, and from there were brought by his descendants into North Carolina, when they resettled his old colony on the Cape Fear River. They were confined altogether to the low country or tide-water region. The Coonahs were an institution principally known on the South Carolina, Georgia and Florida coast, and in New Orleans.” Miss Cameron has an interesting theory, but apparently it is erroneous.)

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At the end of slavery days, John Kuner had such a strong appeal to both blacks and whites that the celebration continued. About 1920 an elderly man recalled (as quoted by William S. Powell in “Old Timers Had Big Christmases,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, December 23, 1951, p. IV-2) that

in Wilmington some years after the Civil War, of all the attractions of Christmas day none gave me more genuine pleasure than the Kooners, or John Kooners, as they were sometimes called.

There were bands or parties of darkies numbering from three or four to six or eight in fantastic costumes with masks or colored faces, who went from house to house in the principal residential sections of the city Christmas morning stopping from time to time on the sidewalk and sang and danced. Some of them had bones and tamborines which they rattled and shook, while the others sang and danced jigs. In each party, there were one or more men attired in women’s garments, and after performing a while, the tamborines were invariably passed around and quite a nice little bunch of change was usually collected.



After this, the band marched off a few blocks on the sidewalk where the same performance took place.

While marching to the rattle of the bones and the shaking of the tamborines, they all shouted in regular cadence

"Haw low, here we go!
Haw low, here we go!
Haw low, here we go—
Kooners come from Denby."

This could be heard for blocks like the music of an approaching band, and as soon as the children in a neighborhood heard it they began to shout "The Kooners are coming," and made a wild rush for the street, where, if there were enough of them, the Kooners stopped and sang and danced for an appreciative audience—mostly youngsters, but generally with a sprinkling of grown-ups.

This custom kept up for a number of years, and finally fell into disuse, being tabooed, I have heard, by certain classes of the Negroes as tending to lower them as a race in the eyes of the public. This, of course, was pure bunk, for as a matter of fact it helped to make the relations between the races more friendly during a critical period of our history. I am sorry it passed, as nothing I know of gave the delight this custom did to children during the Christmas festivities.

James Sprunt (1846-1924) of Wilmington (quoted by Powell) also believed that nothing at Christmas from 1850 to 1880 was more enjoyed by the children than the John Kuners, for

At every corner of the streets, sometimes at every open door, the procession would stop and the Kooner to the accompaniment of banjo, accordian, tambourine or other musical instrument would dance and sing the weird tunes in vogue for this occasion. I remember the high pitched crescendo voices "Oh little Liza Dramp oh drampo" and another familiar tune,

"I am gwine away; gwine away
to come no more—I am gwine away,"

followed by the chorus from the lusty throats of the others who took part. Of course, our people responded generously in contributions of money or cake and fruit.



Other John Kuner songs were recorded (Dougald MacMillan, "John Kuners," *Journal of American Folklore*, 39 [January, 1926], 53-57) by an old-timer, D.T. Cronly of Wilmington. Unlike those sung by the slaves at the Scotch Hall, Somerset Place, and Buchoi plantations, the songs of the Wilmington blacks seemingly had nothing at all to do with the Christmas season. Here is one:

Solo: Young gal go ROUND de corner!

Chorus in harmony: My true love gone DOWN de lane!

Solo: Wet on de grass where de djew been poured.

Chorus: HEY, me lady, go DOWN de road;

Go DOWN de road; go DOWN de road!

My true love gone DOWN de lane.

Another song concerned a black fellow named Beau Bill. It seems that Beau Bill had offended the law by conducting a dance hall in the town.

Old Beau Bill was a fine old man,
A riggin' and a raggin' in the world so long;
But now his days have come to pass,
And we're bound to break up Beau Bill's class.

Refrain:

So sit still ladies and don't take a chill
While the captain of the guard house ties Beau Bill.

Following the singing of such songs as these, dancers performed "Chicken in the Bread Tray" and "Cutting the Pigeonwing." If the hat then passed collected insufficient coins, the John Kuners ran down the street, singing

Run, Jinnie, run! I'm gwine away,
Gwine away, to come no mo'.
Dis am de po' house,
Glory habbilulum!
Hah! Low! Here we go!
Hah! Low! Here we go!
Hah! Low! Kuners comin'.

In one aspect or another, his worship the John Kuner appeared elsewhere in North Carolina. He was reported in Martin County and as far upstate as Iredell County (see William S. Powell article). He was said to have performed in Southport and Fayetteville (Eleanor B. Powell, "Old Tar Heel Christmas Customs Outlined," *Raleigh News and*



Observer, December 20, 1953). He was known in Hillsborough and New Bern (Louis T. Moore, "John Kuners—Wilmington's Colonial Christmas Celebrants," *Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region* [Wilmington, 1968], pp. 74-78). But by the 1880s, the arrival of black John Kuner at Christmas had all but ended. Perhaps it was not merely the new dignity of the Negroes which required his demise, but an emerging ruffianism of the masked revelers.

Oddly enough, the custom survived for a while among whites who seem not to have been aware of its Negro origin. In eastern North Carolina villages before the turn of the century, "joncookers" were an established part of the Christmas observance.

Joncookers were young men, usually the beaux of the village, who on Christmas afternoon—never any other time—dressed up in the most outlandish feminine attire they could find, masked, and rode horseback up and down the streets throughout the afternoon. Their masks were not the romantic-looking black ones such as are worn to masquerade balls, but awful-looking "scare-faces." A joncooker was certainly not good to look at. To one who did not know what composed him he was unspeakably terrifying. (Frank English Cox, "Whence and Whither," *Raleigh News and Observer*, December 13, 1936.)

In Fayetteville the "Johnny Cooners" were said to be "the rag-tag and bob-tail of the community, and children." They went about the streets singing,

Oh, poor Cooner Johns
Farm, farm, my lady;
Give poor Cooner one more cent,
Farm, farm, my lady.

The word *farm* was presumably a contraction of *for me*. (Nell Battle Lewis, "Incidentally," *Raleigh News and Observer*, December 22, 1935.)

In 1938, when prominent New Bern citizens planned to revive the custom as part of the town's Christmas celebration, those who remembered how it was practiced there, and in nearby Kinston, recalled that

Young men would dress in humorous costumes, often donning loose Mother Hubbards or other garments of women, and usually blacking their faces, then would go riding through



the streets around 5 o'clock on Christmas morning to awaken residents with their Christmas carols and other songs.

Some of the men rode cows, goats, donkeys, oxen, horses or mules, usually bareback. Others drove in a large dray, pulled by white horses or mules. Still others walked along with the procession. Many who preferred not to blacken their faces wore clown costumes and facial masks. The identity of the performers was supposed to be kept secret.

With the blowing of horns, the playing of musical instruments, the calling of Christmas greetings, and the singing of songs, the group went slowly around the town, stopping at many homes for special serenades. Frequently they were invited inside for refreshments. After a number of such stops for liquid refreshments, their antics grew more ludicrous. It is recalled by elderly residents that children were often more interested in watching the John Kuners than in playing with the toys left them by Santa Claus.

(Gertrude S. Carraway, "New Bernians Are to Revive Ancient Christmas Custom," *Greensboro Daily News*, December 25, 1938.)

But the custom was fading away, even among the whites. When the brash young men no longer paraded the streets, the boys of the town brought on a gentler observance. There remains a reminiscence from Wilmington in 1905:

Do you remember when we went "Coonering"? Each year after the exciting festivities of Christmas Day had gone by, and, in an effort perhaps to overcome the let down feeling, the boys of my neighborhood...began to think of "Coonering." "Coonering" was engaged in at no other time except between Christmas Day and the New Year.

A group of from five to ten boys ranging in age from nine to sixteen would with great preparation gather together after supper, when the dark had fallen, and each would don whatever costume or garment he had been able to get. There were sashes, and shawls, overcoats, and long pants (most of us being in knee pants at that time). There were red bandannas and shirts and dresses. Everything had to be old and ill fitting. And then there



was always the "Cooner Face" or mask to completely cover the features, so that none could tell who we were. We were always a motley crew.

The procedure was to call on selected homes in the neighborhood. We only called upon those we knew and those we liked. We would ring the front door bell. I do not remember ever having been refused admittance, and it was always done with an apparent pleasure coupled with considerable amusement. We did not call on the children, but upon the older folk. Our own particular homes were omitted, and left for others to call upon, which they always did.

When admitted we were ushered into the living room or the parlor and comfortably seated. Then began a conversation mostly led by those we had come to visit. We did not sing and we had no particular program to follow. We did not try to say or do something funny, but just fitted ourselves into the mood of the home we were in. There was plenty of giggling however.

It being the Christmas season there was always plenty of fruit and candy around, and we were generously plied with these, which we put into our pockets, as to eat would mean the removal of "Cooner-faces," and that was just not done. We were glad to get and accepted the candy, but that was not our purpose, as most of us at this season had plenty of that at home. We never stayed long at any house, and seldom overstayed our welcome, and in that manner were able to make several calls in one night, and before time to be in bed around ten as our mothers had demanded.

What was the real purpose? Purpose!? There wasn't any purpose. It was just fun, and we had fun, getting ready, doing, and laughing about it afterwards. Why did we do it? Well, I did it because my older brother had done it. My father had gone "Coonering" before me, and they appeared to have been pleased with it and had fun.

I never knew that there was any other name for a funny face, or mask, as we call them now, but a "Cooner-face." I was astonished to find in my later years that only in Wilmington



were they so called. At any time of the year a mask was a "Cooner-face," no matter what it looked like or when. But we never went "Coonering" except at the Christmas season.

During the Christmas of 1905, Edward Ash, Glasgow Hicks, Hart McKoy and I went "Coonering" and called on the Kenlys. They had a visitor from the North who was so intrigued by our local custom (which I then thought universal) that she had us dress up again the next day, and she took our picture [reproduced with the account], which I still have.

(Henry Bacon McKoy, *Wilmington, N.C.—Do You Remember When?* [Greenville, S.C., 1957], pp. 141-45.)

And so it was that his worship John Kuner died away in eastern North Carolina. But not elsewhere. The black natives of the Bahamas and Jamaica (and Nevis?) kept him going, and today in the West Indies he is an established part of Christmas. There he is known as John Canoe (Mary Moseley, "The John Canoe Festival," *Nassau*, Winter 1955-56, pp. 29-31; Herma Diaz, "Merry, Merry John Canoe in Jamaica," *Dance Magazine*, December 1969, pp. 16-17).

The most diligent and trustworthy account of the origin of the custom is Ira deA. Reid's "The John Canoe Festival: A New World Africanism" (*Phylon*, Fourth Quarter 1942, pp. 349-70), which argues that, instead of being derived from French jongleurs or English mummers, John Canoe goes back to west Africa. His prototype was a tribal chieftain named John Connou, who flourished about 1720 at Tres Puntas in Axim on the Guinea Coast. A festival he originated was brought by slaves to the West Indies in the eighteenth century, and later transported to North Carolina, whose more wealthy plantation owners had continuous commerce with the islands.

It seems unlikely that the John Kuner antics at Christmas will be revived except in the arts. For instance, in Paul Green's *The House of Connelly* (1931), white merrymakers appear at the mansion house on Christmas evening (Act I, Scene 2; Act II, Scene 3). "They are dressed," writes the dramatist, "in all sorts of outlandish garbs—some wearing their clothes backwards, some with masks or doughfaces on, and others painted like Indians on the warpath" (p. 41). The time of *The House of Connelly* is "The early years of the twentieth century."

John Kooner ~Revisited ~Linda Werthwein

Cows' tails and coonskin caps, ribbons, rags, deer hide racks, whips, mirrors flashing, dancing to barrel drums with goat skin tops, soliloquies and sudden stops of acrobats —the performance was unmatched. Word picture by Linda Werthwein

The cover illustration, "John Kooner," reflects the brilliance, joy, and celebration of survival of the displaced people who came in chains from Africa to eastern North America and to the islands and mainland of the Caribbean and Central America. John Kuner signifies the connection between Africa, the slaves' mother soil, and all the shores where they landed. Through determined adaptation that ensured the ultimate survival of both the people and their cultural traditions, masquerade remains a tribute to African-European-American Indian-Caribbean peoples. Looking at variations of traditional masquerade from selected regions of West Africa, the Eastern Caribbean, Belize, and North Carolina, this work traces the connections in concept, dress, and dance form.

My interest in masquerade came out of a background in dance and a fascination with tales of the old days I heard from the village people I met during my stays in the Caribbean. Carrying a tape recorder and sketchbook, I attempted to capture what I saw as the character of the Caribbean — color, rhythm and light; laughter, culture, and creative survival. My whirling images of brilliant colors dramatize for me the rich and complex story of survival that connects West Africa to the Caribbean, Central America, and the southeastern seaboard of the U.S. through the heritage of the traditional masquerade.

As a graduate student researching ECU's African Art Collection, I began formal study of the roots of masquerade. Since then, I have done field studies, beginning in 1981, in a number of Caribbean islands and in Central America, but concentrating on Nevis, Dominica, and Belize. Through ECU's Summer Studies Abroad Program, I created the opportunity for ECU students to do cultural research and "plein-air" painting in Caribbean locations. Traditional masquerade has become, for me, a life study.



Some civilizations have glyphs and tells to mark their life journeys; the people who came in chains from Africa have rhythms, cloths, tales, and “talks” (dialects), formalized in performance traditions. These traditions are passed through generations primarily by the men; young ones learn from their elders not to divert from the traditional steps, cloths and “talks.” The heritage bearers are consciously reflecting their sense of connection to those they call “cousins” across the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, careful to preserve the integrity of these performance traditions. As Rev. Davidson Morton of Nevis, W.I., told me, “The masquerade—that’s all we have of our heritage.”

“Koonering,” a masquerade that was known in North Carolina through the nineteenth century, grew out of West Africa. The roots of West African masquerade mixed with European and American Indian elements as African people moved into the Caribbean, Central America, and the southeastern region of North America. John Koonering, emerged in the course of that journey. Valuable traces of John Kooner performances are found in the diaries and commentaries of travelers, governors, missionaries, and slaves. From these records we find descriptions of slavery contexts in which African masquerade traditions transformed to John Kooner displays.

As often as the slaves had time to themselves, they released celebrations and frustrations in drum, dance, and dramatization. Under the moonlight, beside a tree, outside the hut, in closed community, and finally throughout the plantation, and into the master’s exclusive space, they creolized a tradition which they called “John Canoe,” “Jonkonnu,” or “John Kooner,” varying the spelling locally. They relived the masquerade annually. On British Islands, primarily at Christmas when rest was allowed, the masters enjoyed rewarding slaves’ labors with praise, pudding, punched-up brew, and a captive audience to their “antics.” Often bitter satire in disguise, a reversal of authority and status, always lined with creativity and laughter, the performance survived.

Edward Warren, the English physician whose memoir records an 1829 visit to the Josiah Collins plantation at Somerset Place near Lake Phelps, [Washington County] North Carolina, describes the Christmas performance known to the Collins’ slaves as “John Koonering.”

The leading character is the ‘rag-man’ whose ‘get-up’ consists in a costume of rags, so arranged that one end of each hangs loose



and dangles; two great ox horns, attached to the skin of a raccoon, which is drawn over the head and face, leaving apertures only for the eyes and mouth; sandles of the skin of some wild ‘varmint;’ several cow or sheep bells or strings of dried goats’ horns hanging about their shoulders, and so arranged as to jingle at every movement; and a short stick of seasoned wood, carried in his hands.

(*For extensive reporting from Warren’s memoir, see Richard Walser’s “His Worship, the John Kuner,” reprinted here, pp. 96-110. — Ed.*)

Similar accounts survive from other North Carolina plantations. Anne Cameron noted music and dancing by a “John O’Cooner” at her family’s estate near Durham on Christmas in 1848 (Fenn 133). George Throop, writing as Captain Gregory Seaworthy, observed a similar performance at a Bertie County plantation in 1849 and wrote about those experiences in his novel, *Bertie: or, Life In the Old Field* (Fenn 133). Harriet Jacobs, an escaped slave from Chowan County, described the “Johnkannaus” in her autobiography in the early 1800s as, “...two athletic men, in calico wrappers...covered with all manner of bright-colored stripes. Cows’ tails are fastened to their backs and their heads are decorated with horns” (Brent 121). Wilmington, Edenton, and Hillsborough, North Carolina were also areas that celebrated the John Kuner tradition (Moore 7).

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Dr. Warren noted that he saw a performance in Egypt during the feast of the Koran “...absolutely identical with that which I had seen in Carolina, save the words of their ‘Kooner’ song” (203). Comparisons with other African performances reveal the unmistakable connection in concept, costume, performance pattern, and movement.

In the early 1800s Sir James Alexander documented the extraordinary attire and acrobatic performance of the great dancer king, Munza of the Mangbetu who lived in what is now Zaire:

Munza was as conspicuous in his vesture as he was in all his movements...he had now attired his head in the skin of a great black baboon...the peak of this was dressed up with a plume of waving feathers. Hanging from his arms were the tails of genets, and his wrists were encircled by great bundles of tails of the guinea-hog. A thick apron, composed of the tails of a variety of animals was fastened round his loins and a number of rings



rattled upon his naked legs. But the wonder of the king's dress was as nothing compared to his action.

His dancing was furious. His arms dashed themselves in every direction, though always marking the time of the music, while his legs exhibited all the contortions of an acrobat's, being at one moment stretched out horizontally to the ground, at the next pointed upwards and elevated in the air.

(qtd. in Thompson 38)

The acrobatic nature of the dance, animal costume elements, and role of power and presence exhibited by King Munza is reflected in the Kooner performance. The lead "rag-man" captured the attention of the master and the entire plantation community and enjoyed a brief time of reversed status. Not only did the "rag-man" take center stage, but he and his entourage were able to shake hands with the master following the performance (Fenn 138).

Widespread among ethnic groups in West Africa are the masquerade elements seen in the examples cited above: emphasis on a presence of power, dance formation throughout the village, acrobatic movements, and costume elements consisting of streamers or pieces of cloth. In Nigeria, the Egungun performance honoring ancestors uses costume elements close to the Jamaican Jonkonnu: predominantly red strips of cloth, hanging from all parts of the body, disguise the performer. The Egungun dancer, "...running, stopping, spinning, ...lunging, starting [again], tremb[les] in place...without a loss of equilibrium, and [experiences, briefly, the] purifying coolness, the wind of God..." (Thompson 225, 226).

On the island of Nevis the traditional masquerade retains a remarkable correlation to the Munza and Egungun performances. Scholar Judith Bettleheim considers the Nevis masquerade a core form, spread to other regions through migrant labor (Nunley and Bettelheim 81). Brilliant streamers, predominantly red, hang from the shoulders of the performer, and peacock feathers on a headdress whirl in the sudden starts and stops of the dance performance. Precise French ballroom steps and acrobatic limbo movements reveal a creolized African-European performance. Like the North Carolina Kuner entourage, the Nevis masquerade troupe moves from village to village stopping at individual houses for a performance rewarded by small monetary donations or



pieces of cake. This occurs during Culturama, an early August celebration originally marking emancipation, and at Christmas.

“Black John” Liburd, retired captain of the Rawlins masquerade in Nevis, trained young men in his village into his mid-70s. In 1996, the date the photograph on the back cover was taken, in response to my remarking on how impressive his performance was at his age, Liburd commented, “You just have to keep fit!” Liburd related that he understood the masquerade came from the Africans, using a costume made of long strips of cloth and ribbons, but the ideas were different. In Nevis, he said it was not “religious,” as it was intended in Africa. To him the masquerade was “...just fun. Just fun!” He never commented on the intent to display “power,” although dance steps include displays of strength and sustained energy. Regretting the increasing lack of interest in the masquerade from the present generation, he commented that, as a small boy he observed all kinds of “sports” (masquerades), but notes that now these things are not happening (Liburd).

In Anguilla, an island once in federation with St. Kitts and Nevis, masquerade traditions died earlier than on many other islands. Rupert Carty, Anguilla resident and son of a sugar estate agent, was in charge of laborers from Dominica who came on schooners to reap sugar cane in Santo Domingo and recalled these performances of the past. As a young boy, he was “terrified” watching the stilt dancer go by. As Carty watched the masquerade troupe from an upstairs window, the stilt walkers would reach out to Carty and shake his hand. One carried a switch like a cattle whip. He would jump and make noise, pretending to lash at another performer; the crowd thought the performer “victim” was killed. The masqueraders traveled from village to village, house to house, and after they entertained for about 30 minutes, they were given 3 to 4 shillings, sweets, a drink or cake (Carty). The mixture of humor with a frightening power display was observed by many islanders I interviewed.

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In Nevis the traditional masquerade competes with the non-traditional. The non-traditional is heavily influenced by professional costume and stage designers from Trinidad, funded by the Nevis Department of Culture. The uniqueness of Nevis is threatened by the spectacle traditions from other islands. The migration of ideas continues.

In Belize the traditional masquerade is known as “John Canoe,” and to the Garifuna, or the Black Carib people, who are most dedicated



to maintaining the tradition, it is known as "Wanaragua." Performed at Christmas, traditional Wanaragua troupes come from rural areas near Stann Creek and Dangriga into Belize City. They travel from house to house performing in much the same manner as did the Kooners of North Carolina and the troupes from Nevis.

In 1933 Margaret Shedd documented the dramatic movements of the John Canoe in southern British Honduras, now Belize.

There were leaps straight up in the air with the feet criss-crossing one another rapidly. Nearly all the positions were taken with the feet off the ground, and the accent gesture, so to speak, was to snap the whole body backwards, as a whip is snapped, at any time and no matter in what position the body found itself. These grotesque checks, wholly rhythmic indeed, but abrupt, were like exclamation points constantly intensifying the excitement. The feeling was for postures of violent angles and contrasts, the torso bent so that the head was backwards near the feet while arms were forward; then from this to a leap upward in the air with legs and arms spread wide apart. (74)

116 A foremost authority and present day John Canoe performer, Father Jerris Valentine, Anglican Rector in the Diocese of Belize, performed the dance in a 1993 video, titled *John Canoe*, made in Belize City. The vigorous movements I observed him make in this documented performance were consistent with those I have seen or read descriptions of from other regions of Central America and the Caribbean.

Valentine's upper torso was quiet while the legs were in a flurry of activity and contortion. The feet were on the ground shuffling, first slowly, then quickly. Knees were bent, hips vibrating, one foot ahead of the other, pivoting on toes, feet crossing quickly as the dancer hopped backward. With hands facing out, and elbows bent, there was a continuous shifting of weight from the back foot to the front foot in a type of vibrating action. Hips were thrust forward, and turns were quick. There were sudden starts and stops.

Arlene Escobar, University College of Belize librarian, observed a John Canoe performance in Hopkins Village in June of 1998. She described a solo performer dancing in the sand.

He made tiny, close vibrating movements, with one leg in front and one behind, up on his toes, slowly working up to top speed



then stopped. The dancer jumped back and forth in the sand. Alternating fury and quiet, fast starts and stops, by the end of his performance he dug a hole in the sand ten inches deep. (Escobar)

Movement patterns of the Belizean John Canoe reflect the drama of the Munza, the Egungun, the North Carolina Kooners, and the Nevis troupes. The costume, however, is quite different. The European influence is obvious, using a military white tunic and trousers, only a few thin ribbons, attached at the shoulder, cross the chest. A headdress of tall feathers dons the performer. Unlike Black John's concept of the masquerade as "just fun," the Belizean concept retains a religious significance. According to Father Valentine, the original concept is a fight between good and evil. The dancer comes into the city (order) from the bush (disorder) late in December, then returns at the New Year, symbolizing the repelling of evil. The children then dance to celebrate good surviving evil. My conclusion is that this concept of the masquerade connects directly to that of the Egungun purification ritual.

In the Commonwealth of Dominica two cultures carry on the cultural traditions of the island—the Carib Indian people and the Creole African-European people. Closest to the African concept in costume and movement pattern is the masquerade known as Sensay, performed by the Creole people. During the Carnival season troupes travel from village to village and perform. In Grand Bay, the Creole capital of Dominica, the Sensay makes a very strong statement. Donned in a headdress of bullhorns, his body covered with multicolored strips of cloth, shredded plastic, banana leaves or rope, and with a machete in hand, the Sensay performer stomps, leaps, thunders, twists, and turns to a relentless drum beat. This dominating presence lets onlookers know that this man is in power; no one dare challenge his authority (Phillips). On several occasions in Grand Bay, Sensay troupes have staged violent machete contests vying for the territory (Henderson).

All of the John Canoe and traditional masquerade performances cited dealt with a display of power, social inversion, reversing the role of slave and master as the slave took center stage and shared the use of his master's property and material goods after the performance. The dance pattern of moving through the village was practiced in each location cited and has been retained in present-day Nevis, Dominica, and Belize. Dress elements utilizing strips of cloth flowing and covering the body were also consistent. Out of all the masquerades cited, the Sensay in



Dominica was the most violent expression. Others were surrounded with laughter and celebration, even though serious satire was in play. European elements included costume pieces and ballroom steps dominated by African movements. American Indian influence was minimal due to limited contact. In St. Vincent, the Caribs intermarried with Africans and were among those forcibly evacuated by the British to Roatan, Honduras. They were the ancestors of the Black Carib or Garifuna people (Palacio 3). The African-Caribbean-American people survived in creative adaptation. Every time they perform, they reassert their heritage of confidence and resilience in a celebration of survival known as John Canoe.

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Lydia Lives at the Jamestown Bridge: A “Vanishing Hitchhiker” in North Carolina

—Laura E. Sutton

Deep among my childhood memories—the pain of skinned knees from playing with friends and the pleasure of family trips to the beach—lies a memory of my first sensation of fear. The day was cool, the sky was gray with clouds, and the air smelled like rain. All the children at Renee’s Nursery School were huddled near the rusted jungle gym. The big kids sat inside the maze of metal, while the little ones and I sat on the low metal bars, our sneakers trailing in the damp sand. The oldest one looked around the circle with a sly grin on his face as he told a tale that I have remembered well:

A long time ago, a girl named Lydia was killed at the bridge in Jamestown. Every rainy night she comes out and haunts the bridge. She waits for cars to go by and tries to hitch a ride. Me and my dad were driving down the road last night in the rain and saw the ghost. She was shiny and white—real spooky. My dad slowed down to get a good look at her. All of a sudden, she started to walk up to our car! My dad hit the gas and we sped away. (The boy’s eyes narrowed and his voice became a whisper.) When me and my dad got home and got out of the car, we found a white hand print on the side of the car where we saw the ghost! My dad said that because we didn’t stop, she marked us. She won’t let us get away next time!

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From the day I first heard about Lydia until I entered middle school, I was both frightened and intrigued each time I rode in a car under the ghost’s bridge. During my teen years my fear faded, but I remained fascinated with the Jamestown bridge and the folklore of the lonely girl wraith trying to stop drivers passing her by in the night.

Lydia’s ghost is, of course, the internationally distributed “Vanishing Hitchhiker” legend. In *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*, Jan Brunvand notes that “this returning-ghost tale



was known by the turn of the century in both the United States and abroad" in such locales as New York, Illinois, Georgia, North Carolina, California, Korea, Russia, and Canada (24). In Jamestown, Guilford County, North Carolina, the Vanishing Hitchhiker, known as Lydia, lives on among those who tell her tale as well as through customs and beliefs associated with the Jamestown bridge where Lydia's ghostly appearance long has been reported, both in oral tradition and in popular press publications.

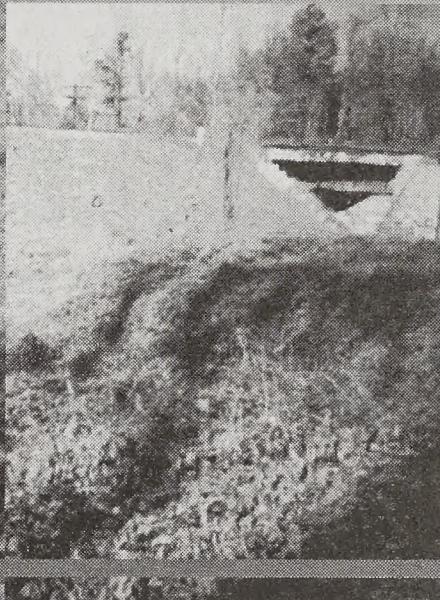
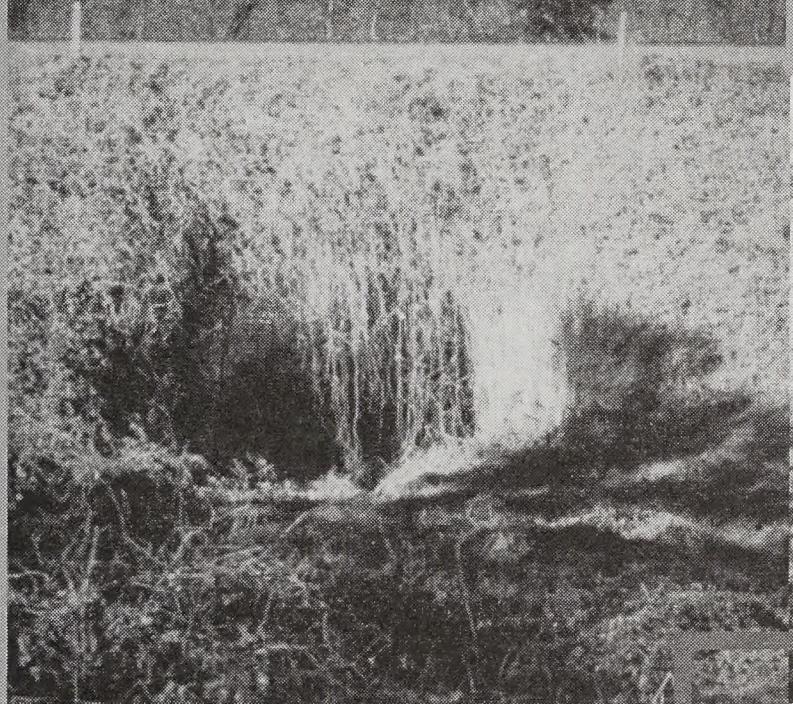
My investigation of the Jamestown bridge and its ghost reveals that the traditions surrounding the site in the 1940s continue into the 1990s; the historic traditions are not static. Tales and beliefs about Lydia's haunt have been shaped and molded by generations into a contemporary legend complex. The international legend of the "Vanishing Hitchhiker," localized in Guilford County, takes on general cultural ideas and beliefs surrounding bridges and becomes a means to express both local history and contemporary concerns.

Jamestown is located between Greensboro and High Point. Motorists traveling from Greensboro by way of the Greensboro-High Point Road pass a graveyard, Ragsdale High School, and a "Welcome" sign before they travel under the bridge and into Jamestown. The bridge is a landmark for residents of Jamestown, Greensboro, and High Point, according to local historian C. Yvonne Bell Thomas (37). Southern Railway trains regularly cross the bridge, and colorful graffiti by local teens, mainly students of Ragsdale High, cover the cut stone abutments on either side of the heavily trafficked road. This is the newer bridge involved in the Lydia legend. The "old" Jamestown bridge sits off to the southwest some fifty feet, obscured from roadside view by a convolution of kudzu vines and other weeds.

Department of Transportation maps of the Jamestown area show that the "new" Jamestown bridge was constructed between 1935 and 1944 in connection with a rerouting of the road. Guilford County District Engineer Lane Hall could find no record of the exact date of the construction, nor the reason for the move, though he conjectured that the "new" bridge was constructed when the Greensboro-High Point Road was rerouted and the bridge overpass widened to two lanes in order to accommodate the growing township. The "old" bridge is only one lane wide.



Photo by Karen Baldwin



Photos by Laura Sutton

The “Vanishing Hitchhiker” at the Jamestown bridge is retold in print by local historian Jack Perdue (11), popular legend writer, Nancy Roberts (9), and folklorist Richard Walser (60-61). East Carolina University Professor Douglas McMillan published versions of the “Vanishing Hitchhiker” reported by his students, but these narratives tell of encounters from locations in eastern counties of the state (91-94). The popular press and printed versions from oral tradition tell essentially similar stories of the Vanishing Hitchhiker—that on a rainy night a

“New” Jamestown bridge (top) displays colorful graffiti on the stone block abutments on either side of the heavily trafficked road. Ragsdale High students call this custom “painting the bridge.” Original, single lane bridge (below left) is obscured by overgrowth. New bridge (below, right) can be seen from vicinity of old bridge.



young woman standing under the bridge will hitch a ride home from a passing motorist. Along with the printed versions, the legend continues to live in the oral traditions of a contingent of local teens I think of as the ghost's "followers," those who share numerous accounts of the legend. Lydia lives through the stories told by generations of residents from Jamestown, High Point, and Greensboro.

Mary Elizabeth Ragsdale has lived in Jamestown since 1939, and is a highly respected community figure. Mrs. Ragsdale's memories are full of the history and traditions of her beloved Jamestown. Her home, historic Magnolia Farms, is also richly involved with the town's history. Mrs. Ragsdale's property lies adjacent to the Jamestown bridge. She recalls the story of the "old" Jamestown bridge, as well as her generation's legend of Lydia:

This girl was killed in an automobile wreck in that area. She was coming back from a dance in Greensboro. Later, somebody came by and saw a girl standing by the side of the road in a white dress and they asked her if they could help her and she said yes, she wanted to go home to High Point. So, they invited her to get in and she told them where she lived. I think it was on Hamilton Street. She gave them the house number. So, he took her there and he got out of the car to walk around and let her out of the door, and when he got around the automobile, she was gone. So, he went into the house and knocked on the door, and this old lady came to the (door), and he told her, he said, "Did you see anything of a young girl in a long white dress?" She said, "Oh, did you pick her up in Jamestown?" He said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, that's my daughter Lydia; she was killed out there in a wreck and she's been trying to get home ever since."

Post-World War II versions of the Vanishing Hitchhiker legend vary. I spoke with several baby boomers, including the secretary at Ragsdale High School, Keith Lackey. Mrs. Lackey is a resident of Jamestown and a graduate of Ragsdale. Her version of the legend distances herself, as if she is not involved with the story:

This story is of Lydia. A businessman was going home from work one night and when he came near the bridge, went under the overpass, there was a young woman on the side of the road. It was rainy and drizzly, and she was in a party dress, and he

stopped to see if he could help her. She looked like she was in tears and upset, and he asked her if he could give her a ride to High Point. She got into the car and they talked and he took her to High Point to the address that she had asked that he take her, and when he got there and stopped the car, she was not in the car. He went to the door and asked the lady there, telling her that he had brought a young girl home, but she wasn't in the car when he got there. The woman told him that it was her daughter and she had been killed in a wreck the year before.

Kathy Dick, guidance counselor at Ragsdale, fondly recalled hearing the legend when she moved to Jamestown in 1960.

What I remember hearing, I guess first, was that there had been a wreck and that Lydia would walk under the bridge and you could hear people calling her name. As you go by the underpass, you could hear people calling, "Lydia! Lydia! Lydia! Where are you Lydia?" Then as I understand it, they were killed going to a dance. I've heard other people say that you can hear her calling the names of the people who were with her.

My aunt, Cindy Barton, Jamestown native and resident there until 1972, was very familiar with the legend as a tale of two lovers.

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What I've heard about Lydia, to my understanding, is she and her boyfriend were on the way to the prom and it was Saturday night. It was raining. It was misty. They wrecked, and they were both killed. She comes back every rainy, I think it's on Saturdays, Saturday nights, and it's rainy and drizzly, foggy, looking for her lover. There have been people that have seen her, which I've read in the paper years ago. And she had, like, a prom dress, a long, flowing dress, and that they pick her up and they take her to where she says she wants to go, and when they get there, she's gone.

After Cindy and I talked about the legend and the Jamestown bridge, we began to discuss family matters. It was during a conversation about her mother that she suddenly remembered another twist in the legend that involved suicide.

The other story I've heard on Lydia was that her boyfriend had left her or had broke up with her, and then was killed. She was so upset and distraught that she went to where he had his wreck at the bridge and committed suicide. That is why her ghost is there and not his.



Although these narratives have a similar core, their differences are interesting. Some shy away from explaining Lydia's death, while others do not. The tale begins to turn on its edge, becoming a supernatural event overshadowed by mysterious voices, a suicide, and an unexplained death. The tale is transformed according to the beliefs and concerns of every generation of its tellers.

A modern perspective for Lydia's tale comes from tellers closer to my own generation—Generation X. I spoke with many “Generation Xers,” all graduates of Ragsdale. One such person was my close friend, Kenny Collins, a 1991 graduate. He grew up in a neighborhood adjoining the Jamestown bridge. The following is Kenny's version of the legend:

The story is about a lady who was driving her car coming back from Raleigh. It was a big dance in Raleigh, or something; I don't know if it was with her fiancée or boyfriend or what it is. She came over the bridge and was involved in a car accident and was killed. The legend says that people drive through there some nights—usually when it's dark and rainy, foggy—and there'll be a lady standing on the side of the road. They'll stop, pick her up, ask her where she needs to go, and she'll tell them how to get to her house. So, they'll drive to her house, and when they get there, the guy usually gets out, walks around to the passenger side of the door to open the door for her, and she's gone. They'll go up to the front door and knock on the door. [A] lady answers the door. They'll tell her what they're there for and the lady would start crying because [she] was [the girl's] mother and she'd tell the guy [that her daughter] had died and this has happened before.

Kevin Collins, Kenny's brother, a senior at Ragsdale when I spoke with him, also grew up with the Jamestown bridge in his backyard. Kevin said that he often visited the bridge with friends.

The story of Lydia. What I know, she was on her way back home from some dance in Raleigh. She got in an accident...and she got killed. There's been stories of people driving down the road late at night when it's raining and there's this girl on the road, in a white dress, and she's asking for a ride. She gets in the car, she doesn't say a word, and the guy usually takes her home. The guy will get out of the car and walk around to open the door for her...she's not there anymore. So, the guy walks up to

the door of the house, knocks on the door, and its her parents, and they tell the guy that she's been killed a long time ago.

Kevin's friend, Cyrus Burroughs, also a Ragsdale senior, was present during the interview and added, "It can be foggy or rainy whenever you see her."

Vicki Craven, my former Ragsdale English teacher, allowed me to sit with her sixth-period class to discuss the Jamestown bridge. All but one student, who transferred to the high school three years earlier, had heard of the legend. One recalled:

I heard that she was at the prom and her boyfriend started drinking. She didn't want to ride home with him, so she decides to walk home...and a train comes and a[n] ax flies out and hits her in the head. And now when people go by they'll see a girl in a white dress and she'll get in the car and be, like... "My car broke down and I need a ride home." And they take her home and they go around the car to open the door to let her out and she's not there. So, they go up to the house where she lives at and [say] "I thought I brought your daughter home, but she's not in my car anymore." And so, they're like, "She died."

Another student offered this version:

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She was...walking back from the prom and she was wearing a white dress and she had an accident. I'm not sure whether it was the train or a car...She died there...It says that...in the middle of the night when it's rainy...that you're supposed to see her ghost...trying to get a ride home...People stop to give her a ride home, and she gets in the car and tells them where to get to her house, and...when they get out of the car, she's not there anymore, and they go up to the door...the person tells them that they brought their daughter home, and that she's not in the car, and they're wondering if she's already gone into the house...The people are always like, "My daughter died...years ago...she's been trying to get home ever since."

A student hesitantly added the following to the other versions of the legend: "I heard a story of the guy that picked her up one time to take her home, gave her...his jacket to wear so she wouldn't be cold, and his jacket was...laying on her grave."



Careful scrutiny of the different versions of the legend reveals such classic folkloric characteristics as maintenance in oral tradition, formalization, anonymity, and variation. For example, each person revealed that the legend was passed to them by word of mouth—from a friend, neighbor, or teacher. This demonstrates the legend's vitality in oral tradition. Every version of the legend contained similar elements: a young girl named Lydia, an automobile accident, a white dress, a male motorist, a young girl's mysterious disappearance, and a woman claiming to be the girl's mother; these elements make up the formula used when each person told a version of the legend. Also, the identity of the girl remained a mystery to each of my interviewees, as well as their own sources for the legend, supporting the traditional characteristic of anonymity.

The significance of the variations of the legend demonstrates that throughout the years, each generation embellishes the tale making it his or her own and claims cultural ownership. Mary Elizabeth Ragsdale's version is simple, detailed, and realistic – almost as if straight from a newspaper article. Keith Lackey, Kathy Dick, and Cindy Barton's versions are a bit vague and more outlandish with features such as ghostly voices of friends and suicide. The versions submitted by my youngest sources, Kenny Collins, Kevin Collins, and the high school students were riddled with modern concepts – substituting parents for the woman who tells the fate of her daughter, substituting a female for the male driving the automobile involved in the accident, and introducing details about flying axes and drunk boyfriends, while retaining older elements such as a borrowed jacket later found lying on the dead girl's grave.

As the generations progress, each group adopts the legend, adding a touch of their own culture and concerns. Kathy Dick's version features an important social aspect—friends torn apart by death. Cindy Barton's version features the element of suicide—contemplation of the meaning of life and death. The periods in which these women live are saturated in memories of war and hopelessness that are reflected in the legend. Such is the same with versions of the high school students: Kevin's version features a family that experiences the loss of a daughter; one student's version features the unusual elements of an ax and alcohol; another student's version features the supernatural element of a jacket appearing on a grave. The period in which these students live is rich with issues such as the importance of family, the problem of alcohol abuse, and technology so



advanced that it can make the impossible seem possible. These issues have become embedded in the tradition of communicating the legend.

Befitting the legend's mystery, confusion surrounds the death of Lydia. Many people are uncertain of how or just where she died. Jamestown historian Jack Perdue believes that the first sighting of Lydia was made at the "old" Jamestown bridge in 1924 (11); a later sighting was documented as occurring at the "new" Jamestown bridge (Davis B1). A student at Ragsdale High School said, "I think she haunts the new bridge." The student justified her statement by saying that Lydia must haunt the "new" bridge, because the "old" bridge, covered with kudzu, is no longer accessible to cars. The "new" bridge is the only place Lydia is able to wave down a passing car to pick her up and take her home.

One interesting practice at the bridge involves playing pranks. Mary Elizabeth Ragsdale recounted the following anecdote while sitting on her front porch at Magnolia Farms, located a few hundred feet down the road from the Jamestown bridge:

One time, I heard, thought I heard somebody hollering for help, and I told my husband, I said, "Well, I'm going down there and see what's happening...to Lydia." So, when I went down; I didn't see anything, and I went under the underpass and turned around and come back down the hill, and...up on top of the underpass were three little boys and they had white petticoats...tied onto a string, and when the cars would get to the underpass, they'd let the petticoat down and beat on...buckets and holler for help. They were scaring people in automobiles.

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A friend, Jane Joyce Wade, local historian and genealogist, also remembered a similar tale:

There was an older gentleman in Jamestown...and he always laughed about it [the legend] and said that he and his brother and some other fellows had done that as a prank one year: hooked up pulleys and wrapped a brick in a sheet and had it on pulleys going across the road...

A student from the English class at Ragsdale, Holly Burkehart, claimed that as a child, she remembered hearing a story about someone who had hung a white dummy from the top of the "new" Jamestown bridge. The pranking lore clearly indicates that Lydia "haunts" both bridges



and is a strong figure among the generations of young adults who “play” with her death, perhaps mocking fear of their own.

Several people claimed to have seen a mysterious woman near the site of the Jamestown bridge – most believed her to be Lydia. Steven Collins, a resident of Jamestown, and brother to Kenny and Kevin Collins, recalled a bizarre sighting while traveling to High Point several years ago:

I guess I was about ten or twelve. My dad and Donny [a neighbor] picked me up from Putt-Putt to take me home. We passed the graveyard and saw some lady standing by her car. Her trunk was open, and so I figured she was changing her tire or something. My dad decided to turn the car around to go back and help her... We were surprised to see that she had disappeared. She was going the same way that we were, so I never understood how we could have missed her.

I relayed this story to Cheryl Helsabeck, a graduate of Ragsdale and resident of High Point, who had a similar story to tell, one she heard from her stepbrother sometime around 1963:

It was real late one night when he and his friends went out there to the bridge. It was raining, so they parked their car and walked down to the bridge...through the weeds to the old part of the bridge. I remember him telling me that he saw the figure of a girl, white you know – ghostly, down near the opening. It scared him so bad that he and his friends ran back to the car and never went back.

Lane Hall of the Department of Transportation told a similar story involving a relative. Lane spent most of his adolescence in Jamestown, and claimed to “know all about Lydia.” He said that he would never forget the story that his great-uncle told him about seeing Lydia late one night. Lane recalled his great-uncle saying that his Ford struggled to climb the hill that once lay at the base of the bridge, and when he saw Lydia, he became so frightened that “he stripped out second gear on the Model A.”

The Jamestown bridge is known not only for its ghost, but also its graffiti. The “new” bridge has been a canvas for the artistic expression of teenagers across the years, especially Ragsdale High School students,



The "new" bridge has been a canvas for the artistic expression of teenagers, especially Ragsdale High School students, who lay claim to—and paint their names on—the concrete bridge abutments.



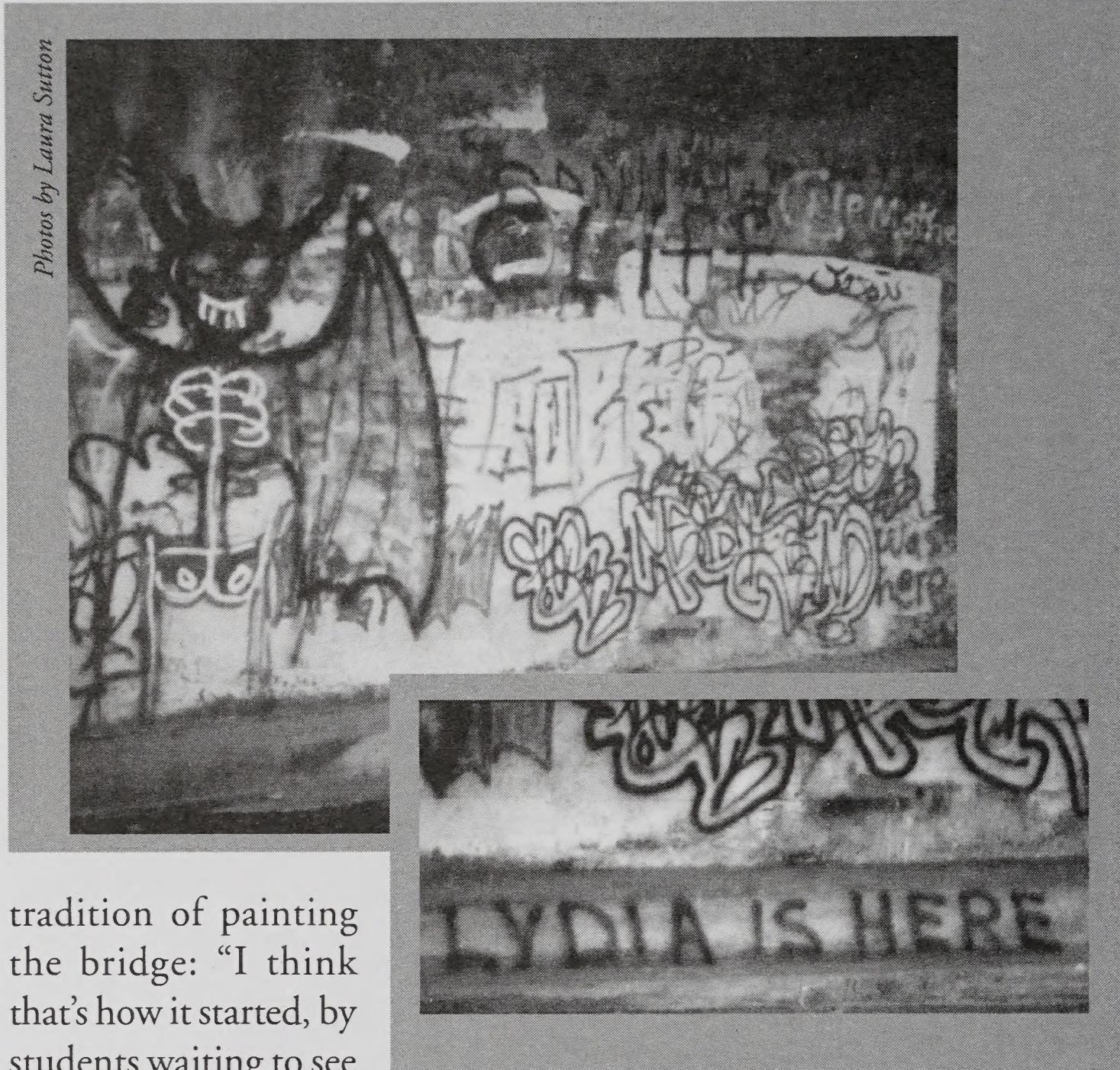
Photos by Karen Baldwin

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who lay claim to the bridge. Since about 1970, teenagers have gathered at the Jamestown bridge to spray-paint names, messages, football cheers, and football sneers; this practice is known as "painting the bridge." Cindy Barton, a graduate of Ragsdale High School, recalled the practice of painting the bridge: "As teenagers growing up, it was a "no-no" to be caught writing on the bridge...but that was the fun of it: going in at one o'clock in the morning, spray-painting the bridge." Cindy went on to say that after the students would paint on the bridge in the late night hours, the next day at school, friends would question them: "Did you see Lydia last night?" My mother, Kathy Sutton, also a graduate of Ragsdale High School, believes that the legend of Lydia initiated the



Photos by Laura Sutton



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tradition of painting the bridge: "I think that's how it started, by students waiting to see the ghost...Lydia, and thinking that, 'Well, while we're waiting, let's paint on the bridge'."

The tradition of painting the bridge has continued for at least thirty years. On August 29, 1997, Ragsdale's rival, Southwest High School, sent a group of students to paint the bridge for an upcoming football game. The students painted a police car, local neighborhood streets and signs, as well as the bridge with graffiti. Since this incident, the Guilford County Sheriff's Department has decided to charge any new spray-painters with trespassing and vandalism (Temple B10). Students at Ragsdale High School were angered and distraught over what they consider the unjust destruction of what had become a tradition and a rite of passage for Ragsdale High School students. One of Vicki Craven's English students stated: "It's not cool that we're getting penalized for something that we didn't do. It would be different if Ragsdale students did it." Another of her students proclaimed, "I don't think it's very fair. It's Ragsdale's bridge!"



Photo by Laura Sutton

"Lydia is here" is inscribed on the curb below a devil figure (left) inside the old bridge underpass. The angel figure (above) appears on the abutment just outside the tunnel whose walls are covered with graffiti.

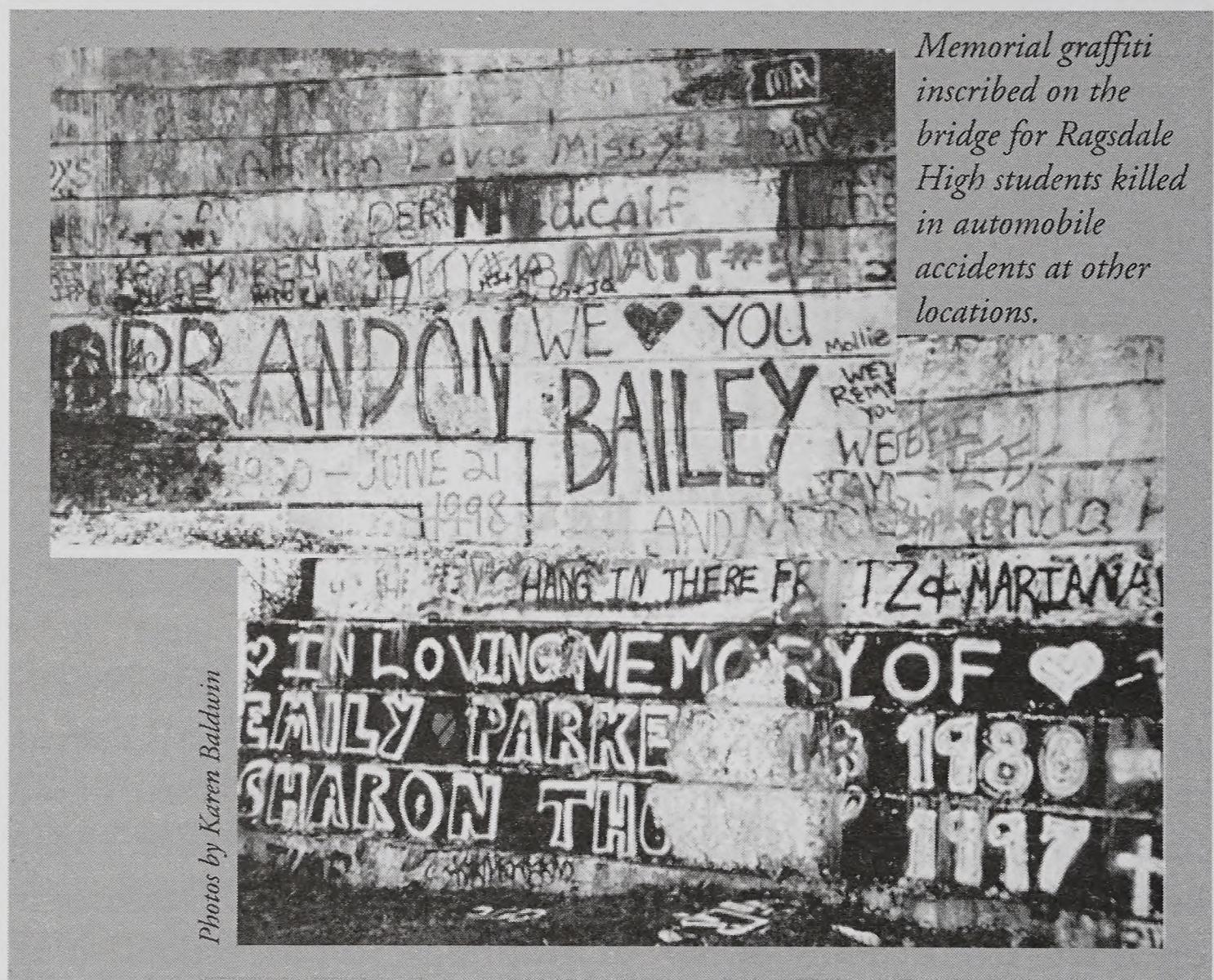
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Perhaps the most peculiar aspects of both the "old" and "new" Jamestown bridges are the connections that can be made between the legend and the graffiti. The "new" Jamestown bridge is coated with layers of graffiti, mostly names of the spray-painters. These names, as well as the school name, "Ragsdale High School," have become closely linked to the "new" Jamestown bridge. Ragsdale is often referred to as the "owner" of the bridge, and the school's blue and white colors are prominent, especially during the football season. The "old" Jamestown bridge is also coated with a few layers of its own graffiti, but this art is not seen by the town, because the old bridge sits away from the current roadway, hidden from sight.

There is, however, a name closely linked to the "old" Jamestown bridge. It is not that of a spray-painter, but rather that of the spirit that haunts there: Lydia. Furthermore, the "old" Jamestown bridge carries a memorial of this famous ghost in the form of a graffiti



angel. Likewise, the “new” Jamestown bridge carries its own memorial – a dedication to the memory of three high school students, Emily Parker and Sharon Thoma, killed in an automobile accident in the spring of 1997, and Brandon Bailey, also killed in an automobile accident in the summer of 1998 (Hiester). The irony and coincidence of the similarities among the three memorials is startling. The landmark has evolved to a roadside memorial – the place Lydia has drawn people to becomes a fitting place for memorials to dead friends killed elsewhere. Remembered on the bridges, the place Lydia made “famous” or sacred, are the memories of untimely, tragic deaths.



Oddly enough, under the “old” Jamestown bridge, there was a gruesome drawing of a devil; a graffito stating, “Lydia is Here”; a mural of the angel, Lydia; a cross reading “R.I.P.”; and a message referring to God. These mythic figures of death and evil on the “old” bridge contrast with real figures of death (students Parker, Thoma, and Bailey) on the “new” bridge. Although the connection is not clear, there is an obvious reference to the contrast of heaven and hell, spirit and devil. The figures are ominous and unsettling.



The “old” Jamestown bridge abutment carries a memorial to this landmark’s famous ghost inscribed as a graffiti angel.

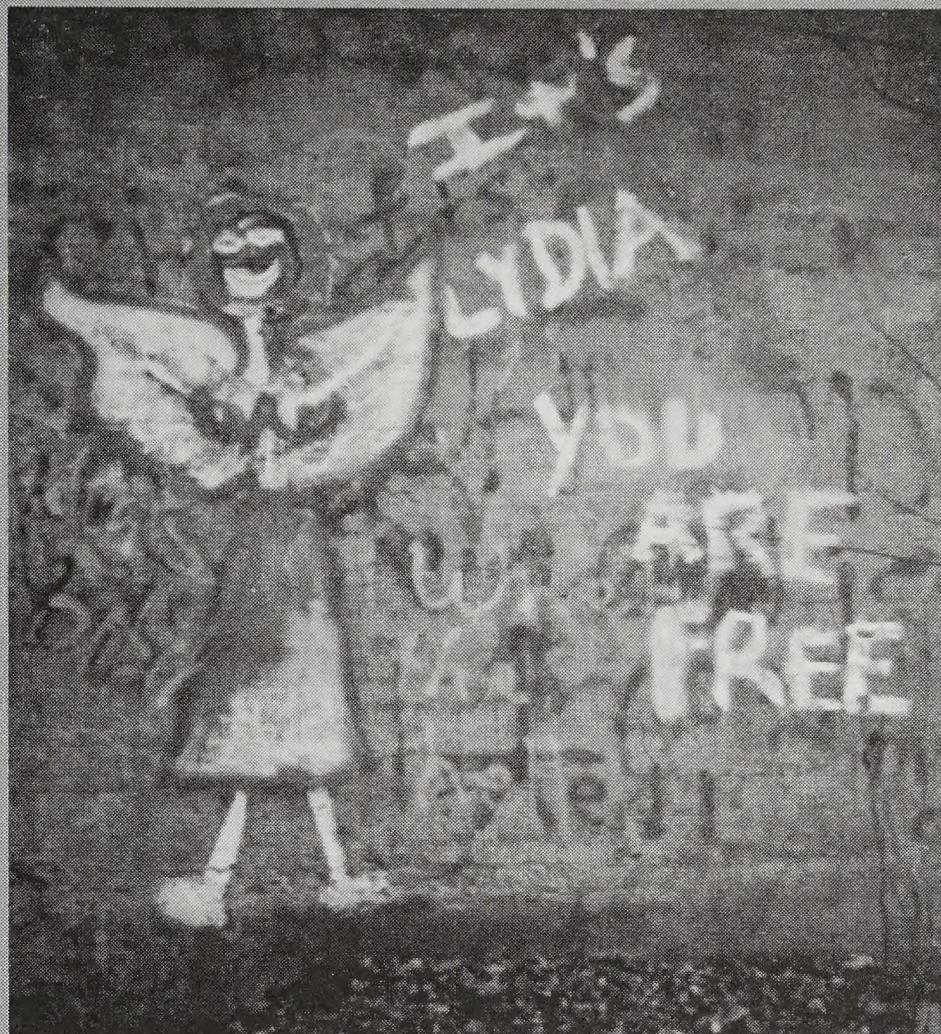


Photo by Laura Sutton

The reality of the legend is as it should be: fleeting. The Guilford County Register of Deeds office has death certificates that show four “Lydias” who died in High Point and Jamestown in 1923: Lydia Jane Norwood died of old age; Lydia Jane McCarthy died of heart disease; Lydia L. Horney died of acute intoxication; and Lethia Barefoot died of typhoid fever. The State Highway Patrol holds records on traffic fatalities, but only came into existence in 1929, six years *after* Lydia’s legendary automobile accident. My search for records of the “real” Lydia’s death was not conclusive.

What I succeeded in discovering is that this legend of a ghostly hitchhiker has shape-shifted into graffiti scrawls and drawings, pranks, and a memorial. At the crossroads of the High Point/Greensboro Road and the Jamestown bridge lies a magical place—mysterious, intriguing, and full of the local tradition that sustains the life of Jamestown’s “Vanishing Hitchhiker” legend.

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Heartfelt thanks to my father for his research help with this article. Thanks also to Vickie Craven and her English class, to Keith Lackey and Kathy Dick, to Mrs. Ragsdale for sharing her knowledge of Jamestown’s history, and to all other contributors. Thanks to Karen Baldwin for her encouragement and help in completing this article. And, of course, my best to Lydia, wherever she may be.



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Seven Brides for a Single Gown: Communicating Through Clothing in One American Family

-Sarah Reuning

“That’s the dumbest idea I’ve ever heard!” announced John as the wedding coordinator left the sanctuary. My husband was referring to the coordinator’s plan that John and I should be alone in the church parlor before wedding photographs were taken. “Really, what’s the point?” fumed John. For dramatic effect, the wedding coordinator decided that John and I should be alone together the first time that he would see me in my wedding gown. When I explained this to John he remained unimpressed. “This is so stupid,” he said. “I’m marrying you, not the dress!”

John would have married me regardless of my outfit. I, on the other hand, wanted one particular dress for my wedding day—I wanted to wear Grandmother Anne’s gown. Unlike any dress I could have bought, this heirloom wedding gown speaks volumes to me and other women in my grandmother’s family. After all, marrying in Grandmother’s dress has become a family tradition.

Family traditions are the basic elements of any culture’s folklore. In *The Study of American Folklore*, Jan Brunvand defines folklore as “compris[ing] the unrecorded traditions of a people; it includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person” (1). Grandmother’s dress is a communicative medium in my family. The repeated act of marrying in this gown, and the stories surrounding each wearing, form a significant element of my family’s folklore. By sharing the history of this dress, I hope to translate its message into words.

The notion of reading clothing may seem strange. Nevertheless, all attire has language. As Penny Storm reveals in *Functions of Dress*, “communication is a function of all dress that has evolved in organized society.” Specifically, dress “communicates social information and personal identity. Dress is a visual statement of the individual, about just who we each are and to which groups we have allegiance” (102, 104).



In “Why We Wear Clothes” Jib Fowles asserts that communication is the “cardinal function” of clothing. “What we are actually doing when we dress is composing messages for each other, messages which are ceaselessly sent and received. This communication helps to determine how we mesh with one another and how our cultures work” (344). All clothing converses, but some garments communicate more information than others. Often, as in the opening story, clothing means different things to different people. As a wedding gown, Grandmother’s dress conveys basic messages that individuals both inside and outside the family can appreciate.

All wedding dresses are inherently meaningful. “No other raiment speaks so symbolically of promise, the mysteries of good luck and...the daunting challenges of the future,” acknowledges Barbara Tober, Editor-in-Chief of *Bride's* magazine (qtd. in McBride-Mellinger 8). In America, as well as in many other countries, wearing a bridal gown is a performative tradition. The bride completes a rite of passage as the wedding guests watch. The bride expresses values in her marriage vows, yet her attire also communicates. White is a traditional color for many modern brides in America. For many people this color connotes virginity (Storm 142). White garments also embody the notion of new life. Like conformation dresses and christening gowns, wedding dresses signify a beginning in time, the commencement of a new journey. In *The Wedding Dress*, Maria McBride-Mellinger discusses the impact of this hue. “The traditional white wedding gown connotes so powerful an image that it is universally acknowledged as the ‘proper’ bridal hue” (9). As a result, some consider it improper for anyone other than the bride to wear white at a wedding.

Symbolic in its own right, the wedding gown also distinguishes the bride from the wedding party and other guests. Because her gown is made from the most luxurious fabric, the bride’s gown is usually the most expensive of all those present.

[T]he wedding dress is a representation of the highest standards of the couturier: a hand-sewn, made to measure gown designed according to the classic principle that a dress should enhance the true beauty of the wearer’s body. The bridal garb, singular in its style and material, highlights the bride. Moreover, the wedding dress foregrounds the special nature of the marriage ceremony.

[V]irtually every bride will exchange her nuptial vows attired in a special dress meant to be worn only once, as a hallmark of the significance of the event. (McBride-Mellinger 9)

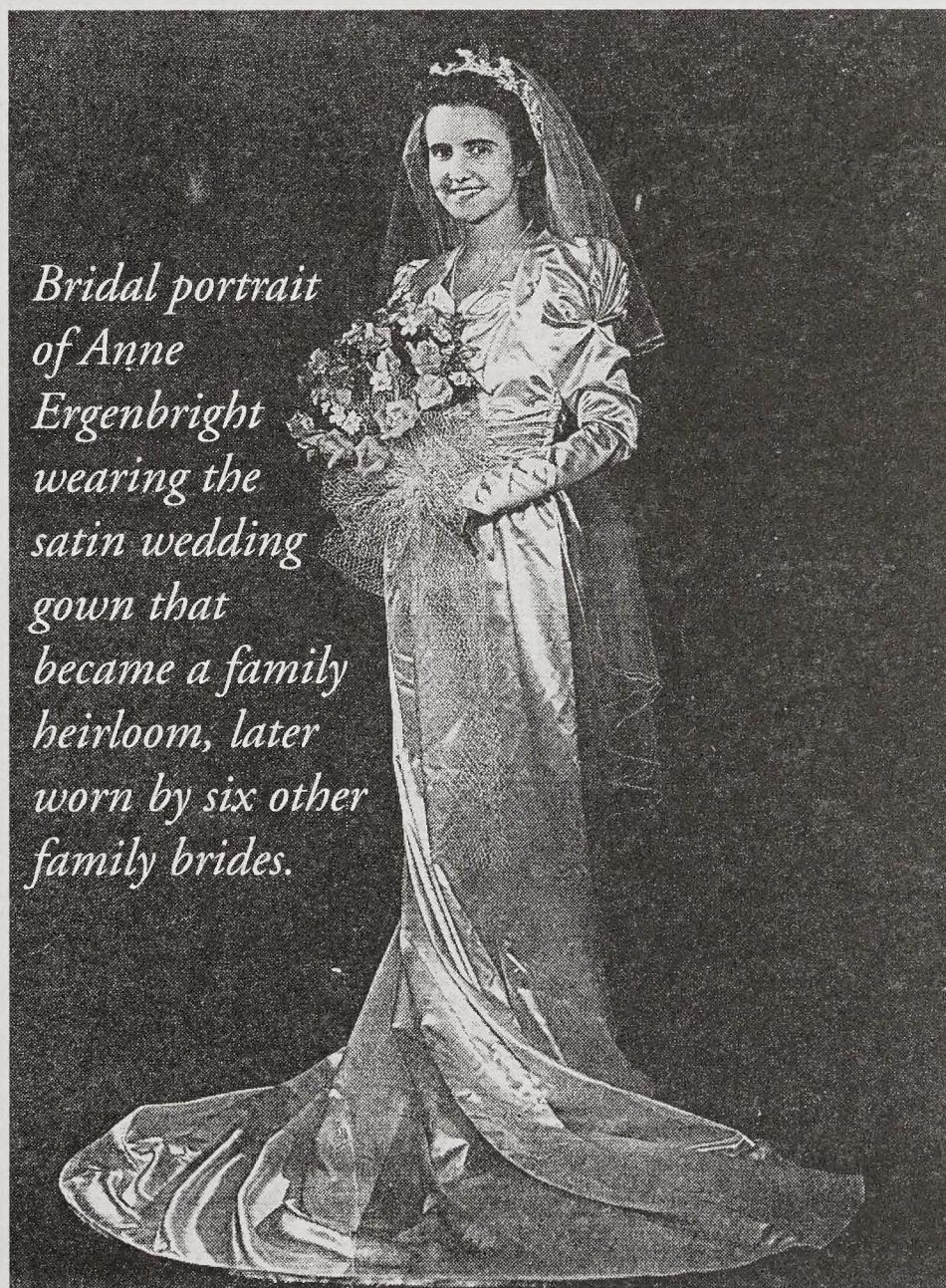


My grandmother, Anne Ergenbright, wanted such a gown, one distinctive enough to render her wedding unique.

Anne Ergenbright was not born to a life of luxury. As the oldest girl of ten children, she could not rely on her parents, who were tobacco farmers, for much financial support. Anne worked hard to put herself through nursing school at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, and graduated in 1934. When she became engaged to Richard Ergenbright in 1940, she knew that she would have to purchase her wedding gown herself.

Grandmother wanted a formal wedding dress but did not have much money to spend on an elegant gown that she would only wear once. When she found such a gown on sale at Thalheimer's Department Store in Richmond, Virginia, she was ecstatic. "I knew when I saw it that that was the dress for me," chuckled Grandmother (Ergenbright). Though it had never been worn, the luxurious dress was discounted to thirty-five dollars, a windfall for Grandmother. Anne wore this satin dress on June 14, 1941, in Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Buckingham County, Virginia. Wearing such a sumptuous gown demonstrated that Grandmother held her wedding ceremony in high esteem.

It was unusual for a woman of Grandmother's economic status to afford such an elaborate wedding dress. In the 1940s very few Buckingham County women were married in fancy wedding gowns. Grandmother's wedding may have influenced her community. "There weren't very many formal weddings in our church before I got married," she recalled.



*Bridal portrait
of Anne
Ergenbright
wearing the
satin wedding
gown that
became a family
heirloom, later
worn by six other
family brides.*



At least there hadn't been any for a number of years. People used to get married in the parsonage with just a few witnesses. After I had a formal wedding, then others started having fancy weddings in the church. I think I started something. (Ergenbright)

Women who attended Grandmother's wedding in turn had their own fancy ceremonies. My grandmother's wedding communicated to others how she believed weddings should take place.

To members of Anne's immediate family, the dress communicated more than just her notion of a proper wedding. As a sale item, her dress embodied good fortune. She could never have purchased such an opulent gown at full price. Anne's second daughter, my mother, described the quality of the dress: "It was handmade, you know, tailor-made, like going to a tailor to have a shirt made especially for you, for your dimensions and body measurements" (Zirkle 1998). Finding a dress like this for thirty-five dollars was like a blessing.

Grandmother's dress is not lavishly embellished with lace, pearls, or intricate embroidery. Nevertheless, two features make it truly exceptional. First, the ivory satin demands admiration. "Satin is silk that is densely woven into a bolt of cloth in a manner that finishes one face of the fabric with a superior, lustrous sheen, while the 'wrong' side is a shineless matte" (McBride-Mellinger 56). Satin can be woven from rayon. However, organic satin, like that in Grandmother's dress, is much more expensive (McBride-Mellinger 57). Due to the cost of production, textile manufacturers no longer make this type of satin (Zirkle Oct. 3). Consequently, Grandmother's dress cannot be reproduced. As a cultural artifact, the gown is priceless.

The second extraordinary feature of Grandmother's dress is its simple, metal zipper. The zipper, running discretely down the left side of the bodice, may not seem remarkable today, but by 1941 standards this gripping gadget is a luxury item. Dr. Bobbi Owen, Professor of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina and specialist in "the history and meaning of clothes," elaborates on this unique fastener:

[Zippers] were[n't] in general use in women's dress clothes until the late forties and early fifties, especially not for custom garments. Zippers just weren't generally available...[To put a zipper in tailor-made clothing] would cost more, and it would

have to be a choice made between a dressmaker and a buyer. A zipper made [a garment] a little more expensive, a little more unusual, a little more up-to-date and modern. (Owen)

Thus, the zipper makes Grandmother's dress avant-garde. Robert Friedel notes in *Zipper* that “[t]here are many tasks that a zipper does better than alternatives do, but hardly any that can't be done more simply.” Hence, the zipper is “superfluous” (viii). Hooks and eyes are simpler, cheaper means of securing a garment; however, they are much more tedious to clasp and unclasp. Zippers cost more than buttons and facilitate dressing. The zipper in Grandmother's dress signifies the value of the gown. Still, the dress's significance exceeds providential regard.

Grandmother's dress was custom made, yet intended for someone else. The original bride-to-be designed the dress in anticipation for a wedding that never actually took place. “I never asked why the wedding was canceled,” admitted Grandmother. “It wouldn't have been polite” (Ergenbright). A wedding was planned, but never happened. As a result, a gown that initially implied tragic separation has come to embody a reversal of fate, now representing good fortune springing from bad.

Negative associations with the dress were reversed after Grandmother's wedding and, as other family women wore the dress, its favorable connotations grew. To Grandmother's wedding guests, the gown functioned as all wedding dresses function, distinguishing the bride and reflecting the importance of a rite of passage. For my family, however, this garment communicated more. Not only did the gown convey good fortune, but, by the third generation of its use, the dress reflected growing prosperity and symbolized the American Dream.

The second woman to wear Grandmother's dress was her sister Virginia, “Ginny,” in 1948. Ginny revealed her reasons for wearing the dress. “I thought it was pretty, and [Anne] said I was welcome to borrow it when I was thinking about looking for one. And I priced them, those that looked like hers, and I couldn't afford them” (Barnes). Ginny's motive for wearing the dress was primarily economic. She wanted a beautiful dress but didn't have the extra money to spend. Recognizing the value of her sister's dress, Ginny recalled, “the lady I carried it to to have it cleaned after I wore it said, ‘You can't buy a dress like this anymore. They don't make them’” (Barnes). At the time of Ginny's 1948 wedding



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"Ginny" (above) wore the gown in 1948; "Sis" (right) was married wearing it in 1959. Between weddings, the dress was stored in its original box up in Grandmother's attic.

most brides wore factory-made dresses. Handmade gowns were becoming increasingly rare.

Marion "Sis" Hughes, Anne's youngest sister, wore the dress in 1959. She recalled, "I could have bought one, I guess, but Anne's dress was much prettier than any of the ones I could afford." Sis couldn't purchase the type of dress that she wanted to wear because she, like her sisters, was limited by her financial means. Nevertheless, the sisters each were married in this luxurious gown. Between weddings, the dress was stored in its original box up in Grandmother's attic.



In 1963 Anne May, Anne's oldest daughter, was engaged and planned to marry after finishing college. Grandmother offered her daughter the satin gown. There was one hitch, though. Anne May was five feet eight inches tall and the dress was made for a bride who was five feet tall. Anne May faced a dilemma:

For me to have been able to wear the dress it would have been drastically altered. And I thought about it, and Mother and I had talked about it, and of course I bought the mantilla to go with it. Mother said, 'Change it however you want,' but I had very mixed feelings about changing it. I had just about decided it wasn't fair for me to alter it that much, but once we eloped it was a moot point...I don't think we could have afforded a new dress – that would have been a stretch. That's why I thought, by eloping, 'maybe this is the better way.' (A.M. Mathes)

Anne May recognized her mother's attachment to the dress. Out of respect for its sentimental value, Anne May hesitated to remodel the gown. Her elopement saved the dress from drastic changes, and enabled my mother, Eva, to later wear it unaltered.

Like Anne and her sisters, Eva faced economic constraints when planning her wedding. Mother recalls:

We didn't have lots of extra money. Remember, we had four girls in the family, and Daddy wasn't fabulously wealthy. We had four, potentially four, weddings to pay for and three of us in college at the same time. We didn't have three hundred dollars to spend on a dress. We were trying to be economical. (Zirkle 20 Sept.)

By this time, Grandmother's veil, worn also by Ginny and Sis, had disintegrated. Mother wore Anne May's mantilla—five square feet of ivory Chantilly lace. Eva wore the dress and head piece partly out of economic necessity, but shared another important motive:

[P]art of it is if you could wear [Mother's] wedding dress, it was kind of special. I mean it was kind of like, [but] not necessarily, a stamp of approval on the wedding, and I don't want to say a good luck charm. It was more than that. The dress just seemed to eke [symbolize] permanency in a marriage. There's longevity. It's like this dress kind of helps seal your prospects for a long marriage. (Zirkle 20 Sept.)



In the second generation of its use, Grandmother's dress gained sentimental value. Mother, unable to buy her own gown, was not disappointed because she knew she would be wearing an elegant garment, one that also signified a lasting marriage.

*Author's mother, Eva Zirkle,
wore the heirloom dress with
a Chantilly lace mantilla
bought by her older sister,
Anne May.*

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Ironically, not all of Anne's daughters recognized the emotional significance of the dress. When Nancy, Anne's third daughter, became engaged, she made plans to transform the dress into a new style. Had she implemented her ideas, she would have destroyed Grandmother's dress. The original gown would cease to exist. Nancy remembers her reasons for wanting to change the dress:

When I tried the dress on originally, it just did not do anything for me. The neckline looked horrible. I was going to cover the whole bodice with Chantilly lace to soften the neckline, and I was going to redo the sleeves, take some of the puffiness out at the shoulders. I tried it on mid-spring and was going to alter it in June, but as it turned out we got married before then. I can't remember if I was going to take the sleeves off. (Jackson)



Nancy never considered shopping for a dress she liked better than her mother's. "Well, we didn't have much extra money, but also, I was just interested in getting married," admitted Nancy. "I really was not into the whole dress up deal...I was the tomboy in the family. Therefore, I was just going to wear it and make it look good" (Jackson).

Nancy initially had no qualms about modifying the dress. Over time, her feelings changed. With relief in her voice, Nancy confessed:

Afterwards...I realized. Mother didn't ever say anything, but later I realized that had I done it, it would have killed her. She would have been mortified. I'm very glad I didn't do it. I didn't think. I didn't connect the tradition at that point as I connect it now. (Jackson)

Nancy's feelings about transforming the dress present a discrepancy. Even though Grandmother allowed Anne May to make alterations, the changes Nancy wanted to make would have devastated her. Why would Grandmother let one daughter, but not the other, alter her gown? The answer lies in necessity.

The changes Nancy wanted to make were nonessential. Grandmother's gown already fit Nancy, whereas it was too small for Anne May. Furthermore, Anne May wanted to retain its original design (Mathes), while Nancy was deliberately creating a new style. Fortunately, for those who would later wear the dress, Nancy changed her wedding date, not the dress. She recalled:

Well, [we were engaged for] two months, but I didn't tell Mother. I only gave mother two weeks notice...I told her I wanted to get married in two weeks at the church, and that's all I told her. She put the wedding together without me doing anything. (Jackson)

Two weeks was not enough time to plan a formal wedding, let alone remake a dress. When the time came, Nancy wore a casual blue frock with a trendy mini-skirt (Jackson).

In 1974, Grandmother's dress did not escape alteration. Mary Beth, Anne's youngest daughter, explained the changes that were made for her wedding. "They had to cut some off the train to make the panels so I could fit in it. The train was longer before I wore it. I weighed one hundred and twelve pounds...[when] Mother [was married she] weighed, what, ninety-two?" (Wood). Mary Beth was the right height



for the dress, but she needed more room in the bodice. The panels added two inches at each side of the dress, but visually, the style remained the same because the bride's arms concealed the adjustment.

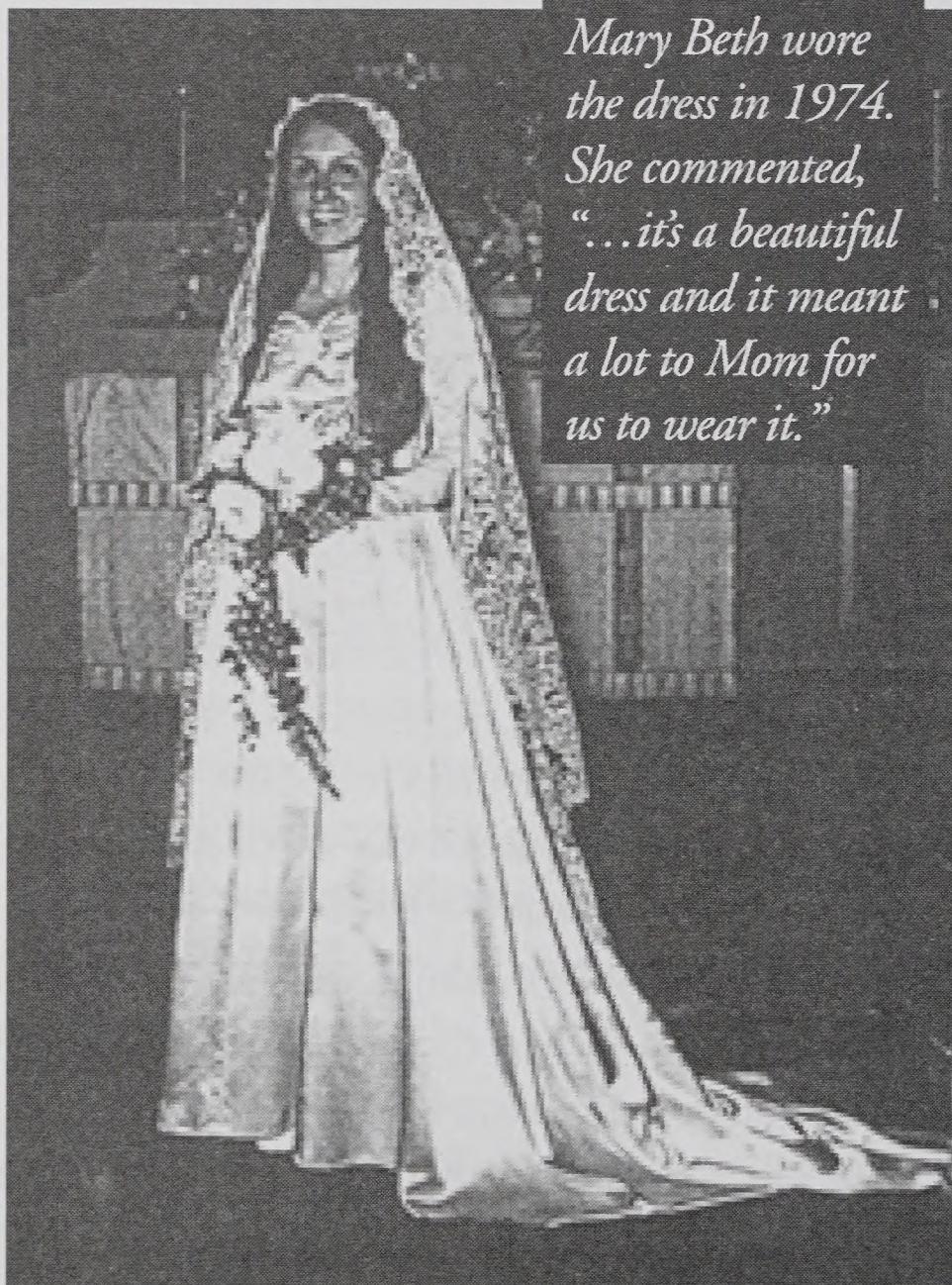
Like Eva, Mary Beth mentions several reasons for wearing Grandmother's dress. "Well, economics being what they are—that's probably the biggest reason, but also it's a beautiful dress and it meant a lot to Mom for us to wear it" (Wood). Here, expense is still an issue, but the garment has appeal of its own. Mary Beth recognizes the allure of Grandmother's gown when she discusses her own experience when shopping for a dress.

I found one that was really pretty, but I chose to wear Mom's. I'm happy I did. The other dress was, well, the style was more contemporary, but the fabric did not even begin to compare. The fabric in Mother's dress is just so beautiful." (Wood)

After Mary Beth's wedding, the dress was put away again in Grandmother's attic and remained there for twenty years before Anne May's oldest daughter, Margret, "Megbe," donned the gown in 1994.

By the third generation of its use, Grandmother's dress was no longer thought of as a less expensive "alternative." Megbe conveyed her reasons for wearing the gown. "It was never a choice. It was because it was Grandmother's dress and it fit. Sure, I could have bought a dress of my own, but I never looked for other dresses" (Margret Hughes). Although the bodice of the dress fit, Megbe was almost too tall for the skirt. She acknowledged,

*Mary Beth wore
the dress in 1974.
She commented,
"...it's a beautiful
dress and it meant
a lot to Mom for
us to wear it."*





"It was too short. I couldn't wear shoes. I had to wear ballet slippers." Even though she would walk down the aisle practically barefoot, she was determined to wear Grandmother's dress.

In 1997 I was married wearing Grandmother's gown, a decision that also had nothing to do with money. Like Megbe, I never shopped for my own gown; I always wanted to wear Grandmother's dress. Perhaps my growing up with photographs of Mother and Grandmother wearing this gown influenced my notion of how a wedding dress should look. For whatever reason, to me, Grandmother's dress exemplified beauty. I could not imagine wearing any other garment on my wedding day. Although I resemble my Grandmother physically, her gown was not an ideal fit. I had to wear extremely high-heeled shoes and a ruffled crinoline petticoat in order to raise the skirt a quarter of an inch off the floor. Regardless, I felt the dress was perfect.

Both Megbe and I could have purchased our own gowns, but we preferred Grandmother's dress. Our ability to buy our own formal dresses reflected the family's growing wealth, but the most important reasons for wearing the dress surface when the economic issues are stripped away.

On the most elementary level, the dress conveys familial love. Several brides described the effect the dress had on other family members. Megbe's sister, Katie, recalls the emotions surrounding Megbe's wedding day:

Mom really got excited. I remember right before the wedding we were in the dining room. We had just toasted Meg and Grandmother. It was just the family, just us. Meg and Grandmother took a picture, and my mom just started bawling. She said, 'I'm so excited for the dress to be worn. This is going to start the tradition in your generation!' It meant a lot to Grandmother. You know how she won't ever say it. She never really says how she feels, but you could tell it was special for her to have her grandchild wearing it. She teared up. (A.K. Mathes)

Katie's story exposes a facet of Grandmother's personality: she rarely expresses her feelings in words. Mother also comments on this trait:

Grandmother is a very private person. I remember one time, and it sticks out because it's the only time I remember her expressing her feelings for Granddad. She said he was an honest



man, and there was admiration in her voice because he was so meticulously honest about everything, but I never, ever, ever, ever, ever remember hearing her say 'I love you' to him. She was never a demonstrative person, never, ever. (Zirkle 14 Oct.)

In a family where emotions are seldomly verbalized, actions take precedence. Choosing Grandmother's gown is a means of saying, "I love you," a means of embracing the family.

Each time it travels down the aisle, the gown addresses the brides who have previously worn it. In a sense, these women experience their own weddings again with each new performance. Reflecting on my wedding, Mother acknowledges this idea: "at your wedding I thought, 'this dress has married a lot of brides. And every single one of them has had a strong marriage, not a perfect one, but a strong one. And that's a whole lot more than a lot of people can say'" (Zirkle 17 Oct.).

The act of wearing the dress acknowledges the former brides, with each new marriage affirming past wedding ceremonies. As a physical representation of a common heritage, the dress stresses family ties. Embroidered in its hem are the initials of all seven brides, representing the bond between these women and within the entire family itself. Naturally, the family applauds those actions that reflect the importance they place on kinship.

"One of the family's first jobs is to persuade its members they're special," remarks Elizabeth Stone in *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins*. Individuals should view their families as extraordinary since "the family's survival depends on [this] shared sensibility" (7). Owning a fifty-seven-year-old, handmade wedding gown makes my family uncommon. Anne May highlights the rarity of such a dress when discussing Megbe's wedding. "When Meg started walking down the aisle you should have heard the congregation. The wedding guests were just 'Aaahhhh!' I mean, just a real *wow* type of reaction to the dress because it's just unusual by today's standards" (A.M. Mathes).

In today's factory-driven economy, older, handmade clothes receive new worth as antiques evoking a nostalgic longing for "the good old days." Antiques resurrect the notion of the master craftsman, the artisan who employs his skill and imagination to create objects that are simultaneously useful and beautiful. Antique objects contain an air of



*Grandmother
Anne Ergenbright
and
granddaughter
Megbe on Megbe's
wedding day.*



authenticity that has been lost in their mechanically assembled counterparts. The desire for authentic experience lures many people toward antiques, especially when the artifacts directly connect a descendant to his or her ancestors. As Megbe notes, many of her wedding guests recognized the value of Grandmother's dress as an heirloom: "Everyone said, 'I wish there was something in my family that has been passed down.' I think they were jealous in a way" (Margret Hughes).

Grandmother's gown sets my family apart from others, and as part of this unique group, each member, including myself, feels special. This kind of group affiliation is essential for establishing individual identity. "Dress differentiates us from others while concomitantly asserting our social integration. Thus it serves to help us form us, our own self-image, and our interpersonal relationships" (Storm 105). Family traditions unite the identities of participating family members. Subsequently, wearing Grandmother's dress heightened my awareness of my status as grandchild, as I viewed myself in terms of my relatives.

Family members use their folklore not only to understand themselves, but also to interpret members of other families. My mother illustrates



this function of folklore when searching for a way to explain the origin of Grandmother's dress:

It was made in the bridal shop for someone else like...like that quilt that's on the guest room bed at Grandma's house that her grandmother and great-aunts made for that soldier during the Civil War and he never came back. I believe it was to be a wedding present, but he died. (Zirkle 17 Oct.)

Clearly, Mother understands the history of another family through her own ancestors' stories. In this way, individuals come to terms with the world via their personal folklore. Traditions are a means of ordering the chaotic events of our lives because they add a sense of stability to existence. In my mother's words:

You know weddings go with tradition. I think one of the reasons those traditions develop is if you do it the way people have done it in your family who have shown down the road the proof of the pudding, a good marriage, a lasting marriage, you kind of want to do it the way they did it. You want the same good pudding at the end. (Zirkle 17 Oct.)

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Megbe echoed these sentiments. "Grandmother wore it and she had a wonderful life, so I thought if the tradition stayed, it would be nice" (Margaret Hughes). For me, Grandmother's dress strengthened my hopes for a good marriage. At a time when divorce rates have soared, the gown represented the family-held idea that strong marriages are possible. The gown's history adds a sense of security to a life-altering event. Stone argues:

All of us, long after we've left our original families, keep some [family stories] with us, and they continue to matter, but sometimes in new ways. At moments of major life transitions we may claim certain of our stories, take them over, shape them, reshape them, put our own stamp on them, make them part of us instead of making ourselves part of them. (8)

During my wedding, I incorporated the history of Grandmother's dress into my own. My embroidered initials became part of this material chronicle. I perpetuated a family tradition but not without modifying it according to my individual desires.

In *The Dynamics of Folklore* Barre Toelken emphasizes the fluidity all traditions must maintain in order to endure. Toelken argues:



All folklore participates in a distinctive, dynamic process. Constant change, variation within a tradition, whether intentional or inadvertent, is...a central fact of existence for folklore...[It is a] defining feature that grows out of context, performance, attitude, cultural tastes, and the like. (7)

Traditions, though structured, incorporate flexibility. These variations are essential to the survival of traditions because without them, repetition results in mass production. Individual attitudes and tastes must influence the performance, otherwise the performer loses his or her identity.

Grandmother's dress provides the structure of our wedding tradition. Variation is achieved with each new bride. From jewelry to flowers, each woman's accessories reflect individual tastes. Note the different hair styles in the accompanying photographs: no two brides wear their locks in the same fashion. Although hair is a physical part of the performer, the style is a component of dress. Storm considers hairstyle "the most universal element of dress since even the naked person has a hairstyle" (120). The seven brides, all in the same dress, assert their individuality by the way they wear their hair. These cosmetic differences subtly alter each reenactment.

The combination of repetition and variation in tradition creates tension. How many elements in a tradition may change without a totally new tradition emerging? Although Mary Beth altered the dress, we still think of it as the same one in which Grandmother married. Nancy's ideas for change clearly crossed the line of acceptable variation, but where is that line? A balance must be found between duplication and recreation.

To date, seven women have worn Grandmother's dress. These brides' stories illustrate that the dress's function has changed over time. Once worn out of necessity, the dress is now preferred over new gowns. The various messages this garment conveys are intricately entwined, woven together like the fabric itself. It is difficult to seize one thread without snagging others. Fidelity, purity, prosperity, love, propriety—Grandmother's dress imparts these notions and many more.

Traditions, like that of wearing Grandmother's dress, are a significant means of nonverbal communication. They provide individuals with a sense of identity and security by rooting them in time and linking them with other individuals. However, people in the same family may not



always cherish the same traditions. Individuals will incorporate into their personal folklore only those traditions that speak to them. My husband cannot read my family history in the folds of Grandmother's dress. For this reason, John does not claim the dress as part of his folklore. However, John values other family heirlooms, documented in our wedding pictures. Passed to him from his grandfather, John's mother-of-pearl cufflinks have tremendous sentimental value. These keepsakes are only worn on very special occasions—like our wedding day.

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The author wearing her grandmother's wedding dress.



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The W. Amos Abrams & Cratis D. Williams Prizes *for best student essays in folklore, 1999*

The prizes in the North Carolina Folklore Society's student contest honor W. Amos Abrams and Cratis D. Williams, two distinguished and longtime members of the Society and former English professors at Appalachian State University.

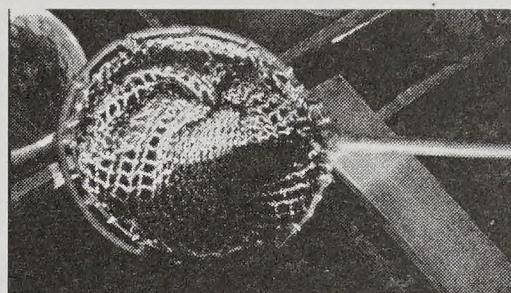
Dr. Abrams, "Doc," as he was fondly known to Society members, began field collecting from students and local folk while teaching at Appalachian in the 1940s and contributed greatly to the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*. After leaving the mountains to serve as editor of North Carolina Education, he continued to be interested in North Carolina's music traditions, publishing articles in the Society's journal, *North Carolina Folklore*, on folksongs and ballads. Doc Abrams served the Society in various offices and on numerous committees, but his best remembered office was his traditional role of opening the annual meeting by playing selections on one of the concert roller organs from his fine collection of those instruments.

Dr. Cratis Williams earned his nickname, "Mr. Appalachia," because of his long service to the region, his Kentucky-homebred knowledge of the variety of Appalachian folklore, his published studies on a performance of ballads and mountain speech, and his monumental literary study, *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*.

The Williams and Abrams awards each carry with them a cash amount of \$100, plus likely publication of the winning essays in the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*. From its inception until 1998, the funding of the Abrams and Williams Prizes was shared by the North Carolina Folklore Society and the Appalachian State University Foundation. In 1999, however, the prizes were generously funded with a grant from Mr. Ray Joyner of Pleasant Garden. The Society gratefully acknowledges Mr. Joyner's contribution to the future of folklore studies in North Carolina, as well as the efforts of the judge for the 1999 contest, Professor Pat Mullen, of The Ohio State University.

Walter & Ray Davenport ~ commercial fishermen

citation by *Jill Hemming*



Homemade round net

“**I**t’s an art to it. You just don’t sew webbing together and catch fish. You’ve got to know how to put the webbing together.” Ray Davenport’s words underscore more than forty years he and his brother, Walter, have been working as commercial fishermen along the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina. The sight of Walter and Ray out tending their pound nets is one familiar to their family, friends, and neighbors in Tyrrell County. Sometimes people forget to see the value in the people and things most familiar to them. They look outside to find the places where “real and important” things are happening. By honoring the Davenport brothers with a Brown-Hudson award, the North Carolina Folklore Society would like to emphasize that the Davenport’s commitment to the deeply rooted coastal tradition of fishing local waters is a real and important thing that is happening right here today—a valuable and distinctive example of local culture and folklife.

As members of a community still tied to the natural resources of the region, the Davenports represent the finest expression of that community’s traditional reliance on the water and the work of their own hands. Born and raised in Tyrrell County, the brothers began fishing in the late 1950s when their father bought them nets and supplies. They have run a shrimping trawler, crabbed with trotlines and crab pots, and fished gill, fyke, and hoop nets among other activities on the water, but their mainstays for most of the years have been their stationary pound nets.

Fishing pound nets demands commitments different from other types of fishing. Not only must multiple sets of nets be hung, they must be periodically cleaned and treated with copper or asphalt, repaired, and rebuilt. Net stakes must be cut from the forest and cured in a pond before being ready to set out in the water. It also takes years of trial and



Ray (standing) and Walter Davenport returning through a canal to their Scuppernong River boat basin. Homemade square net and coffee thermos (above).

error to learn where to place nets and how the weather and movement of water will affect the fish catch in those nets. The brothers often find that other fishermen look at their nets and copy their methods, a tradition of occupational borrowing that the brothers also use. When they see a good idea they put it to work for themselves.

To appreciate the Davenports' occupational tradition, it is helpful to understand the context of their lives and work. Tyrrell County lies in the estuarine lowlands towards the coast in an area where water has long dominated local life and culture. Driving through coastal communities, it is hard not to run into landmarks and people that underscore the continuing importance of fishing culture. Surrounded



by the Albemarle Sound, the Alligator and Scuppernong rivers, and countless creeks, swamps, and man-made canals, Tyrrellians have long relied on the waterways and the resources associated with the water. Early settlers in the eighteenth century first relied on fishing before they were able to clear and cultivate the land. The development of transportation networks, refrigeration, and expanding markets in the late nineteenth century gave rise to the occupation of commercial fishermen along the Albemarle.

There have been distinct stages in the industry's history. In the middle of the eighteenth century, an Irishman named John Campbell introduced seine net fishing to the region. Campbell's was the first commercial fishing house, one that still operates today in Colerain, Bertie County. This method of fishing required a significant investment in equipment and a large working crew.

As fish numbers declined at the turn of the century, the seine nets ceased to be economical and area fishermen started to explore less costly ways to harvest fish. Dutch nets, a stationary net patterned after weirs made by Native Americans, were introduced to the region from the North. The nets found favor because of their good design, relative economy, and the fact that they could be fished by only two men. By the early twentieth century, the re-named "pound nets" lined the sounds and rivers as decades of area fishermen gained practical knowledge of the demands of harvesting from the water, including building nets and boats, reading the weather and the movements of fish, and developing variations on the old methods of fishing to increase speed and efficiency.

As pound net fishermen who learned from older fishermen, the Davenport brothers represent a continuation of history. Describing their start in the early fifties, Ray explains,

It was such a fascination to watch the older fishermen. We had a guy that had done some fishing that wanted a job and he didn't have enough money to get in the fishing business, so dad set Walter and I up and that guy helped us get along. And then all the older fishermen, we'd sit around and talk to them and pick up bits of information. And through trial and error and years of work, you learned what would work and what wouldn't work. We didn't jump right in with a rig like we've got today to fish with. You pieced it together through the years. And the more you learn about it, the better you can do it.



As he grew up, Ray spent as much time as he could hanging around the boat shop of well-known Tyrrell County builder, Willy Spencer. There he learned the art of building juniper wood boats that reflected the usage and aesthetic preferences of the community.

I've been fascinated by boats ever since I can remember. And when I got old enough I could go to town, there was a boat builder up there named Willy Spencer that built boats. And I cleaned up his shop and toted tools to him and whatever I could do to get on his good side and watch him and help him. And it got to the point that every time I had a chance I was helping him and it got to the point that if he was going to build a boat, he was getting old, he needed some help, he'd call on me.



Walter scooping fish from boat into boxes in the back of Ray's truck.

"Of course we build our own pound net boats. I've never seen a fiberglass boat that would work in a pound net good as a wooden skiff will work."

- Walter Davenport



Walter and Ray take up webbing from the lead of the pound net (right). At dockside, the Davenports unload a box of fish caught from the Scuppernong River.



All photos in this article by Jill Hemming and courtesy of the North Carolina Arts Council, Folklife Program

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Ray's apprenticeship allowed the Davenports to build several work boats, each tailored to suit particular functions. Their boats are typified by rounded corners in the stern, to keep netting from catching, and a slight curve from bow to aft that helps the boat to ride swells. The Davenports' wooden boats, shaped by the region and their functions, stand apart from the fiberglass models mass produced outside the community. Walter explains the brothers' commitment to wooden work boats:

Of course we build our own pound net boats. I've never seen a fiberglass boat that would work in a pound net good as a wooden skiff will work. The old-timers years ago designed a wooden boat—I guess they probably had a lot of trial and error—but they built a boat that was really seaworthy. If you want a good pound net skiff, you've got to have, we call it, a little bit of "tuck" in the bow and a little bit of "tuck" in the stern. And she'll free herself from the seas a whole lot better than one that's straight on the bottom.



Coming from a traditional background of self-reliance and making do, Walter and Ray seldom buy what they can make. In this way, they have gained encyclopedic knowledge through asking questions of other fishermen and learning by experimentation. Area fishermen recognize the thoroughness of the Davenports' ability to work on their own gear, skills that many do not have the patience to develop for themselves. "We get a lot of questions on how to hang a net or how to make a tunnel or how to cut a piece of webbing," explains Ray.

We have a lot of fishermen that's in the fishing business that can't even mend net. They don't last long. If you're going to be a fisherman, be a fisherman. Really, the fly-by-nighters are the ones that leaves a lot of webbing in the water. Trashing the water, I call it. If I catch him leaving it out there, I will turn him in. There's somebody coming after me that wants to use it. I'm not the last one that's got use of it. There's somebody for generations on, I hope—a thousand more years, I hope, that somebody can use it and enjoy it.

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Local fishermen recognize this integrity and regard the brothers highly as some of the hardest working and most knowledgeable fishermen in the area. The Davenports have mastered the art of boat building and rebuilding; net building, hanging, and repair; welding, sawing, and sewing their own fishing tools and gear. There is practically nothing that they use that they did not either make themselves or that they have not altered in some way to meet their exact specifications. They have also developed a seasonal routine and innovative system of work that sets the standard for other fishermen. When I visited Tyrrell County as a folklife researcher for the North Carolina Arts Council, I asked people who best represented the folklife expressions and values of their community. People repeatedly suggested that I meet with the Davenports, and after talking with them, going out on Albemarle Sound, and seeing them at work, I came away awed by their tremendous knowledge of the water where they make their living.

For these many reasons, I am pleased to see fishermen Walter and Ray Davenport of Tyrrell County receive a 1999 Brown-Hudson Award. I believe they should be honored for their exemplary commitment to a heritage occupation and for a lifetime of being "fishermen" in the fullest senses of the word.

Bishop Dready Manning ~ gospel artist and sanctified preacher

citation by *Glenn Hinson & Sally Peterson*

Every first and third Sunday morning, churchgoers at St. Mark Holiness Church—a small church in rural Halifax County—raise their voices in jubilant praise. Accompanied by drums, bass guitar, keyboards, tambourines, and clapping hands, the saints of St. Mark's let their voices soar, pushing their praises beyond the church-house walls to echo across the surrounding fields. Leading the singing at the front of the sanctuary is the church's founder and pastor, Bishop Dready Manning. As he sits in a wooden chair beside the pulpit, Bishop Manning lays a solid foundation for the praises with his delicately fingerpicked guitar. On some Sundays, he pulls a harmonica from his nearby guitar case, cups his hands over the harp and microphone, and launches into a wailing lead that seems to seamlessly add another voice to the chorused hosannas. The sounds of Bishop Manning's guitar and harmonica instantly evoke an earlier era, one in which traveling evangelists brought their musical mastery to streets and meeting-houses across the Carolinas. Stylistically rooted in this earlier period, Bishop Manning has chosen to keep this "old-time sound" alive and vibrant in his church. "The Lord gave me this way of playing," he explains, "and He told me to use it in His service." In recognition of his longstanding commitment to both his music and his ministry, the North Carolina Folklore Society takes honor in presenting Bishop Dready Manning with the Brown-Hudson Folklore Award.

Born in 1934 in the farming community of Gaston, N.C., Bishop Manning grew up hearing local guitarists and "harp" players who frequented his parents' house and those of nearby kinfolk. These artists all played the blues, playing in styles that, by the early 1930s, had come to be closely identified with the Carolinas. At age seven, Dready Manning decided to follow in their footsteps and began learning the melodic intricacies of fingerpicked guitar. He took as his models the playing of



local bluesmen and the recordings of such regional favorites as Blind Boy Fuller and Buddy Moss. Blues, he recalls, was his “first way of learning guitar”; though he’d heard the picking of sanctified guitarists, it was the more familiar blues that caught his ear. By his mid-teens, Dready Manning had added harmonica to his repertoire and was playing regularly at local drinking joints and house parties. Throughout the area, he earned a reputation as an all-around master of the blues.

That all changed in the early 1960s, when Dready Manning fell victim to a lingering illness that laid him in his bed for months on end. The ailment puzzled the local doctors, who tried in vain to effect a cure. Finally, his mother invited some neighbors—holiness believers who testified to the healing power of God’s grace—to pray over her son. Bishop Manning recalls that as he heard their prayers, he realized that his illness was the result of walking Satan’s path. While still in bed, he accepted Christ as his savior, was saved, and instantly began to recover. As all signs of his illness vanished, he realized that the Lord was calling him to use his musical gifts towards God’s service. So Dready Manning turned his back on the blues, joined the New Jerusalem Holy Church in Garysburg, and began to play his guitar in weekly services.

Six months later, Dready Manning again felt the pull of God’s call. He wasn’t only to play in church, the Spirit told him; he was also to preach. When his pastor and others confirmed this calling, Dready Manning began doing periodic pulpit duty at his home church; he also started holding home prayer services throughout the community, and would rent storefronts to set up church missions. During summers in the late 1960s, he started holding open-air prayer services in a rural community just north of Roanoke Rapids; as he built a small congregation, he discovered that the land directly across from the prayer service site was up for sale. Bishop Manning says that the Lord led him to that land, which the congregation purchased, and immediately began to lay the foundation for a church. Within a few short months, St. Mark Holiness Church was hosting regular services, with the preaching and music led by Bishop Manning and much of the singing led by his full-voiced wife, Mother Marie. Shortly thereafter, the congregation put a manufactured home next to the church and invited the Manning family to make that their new home.

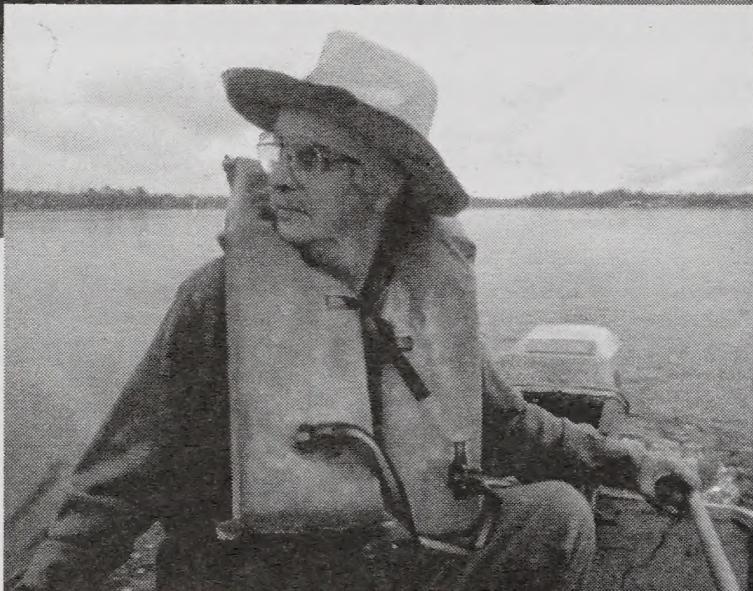
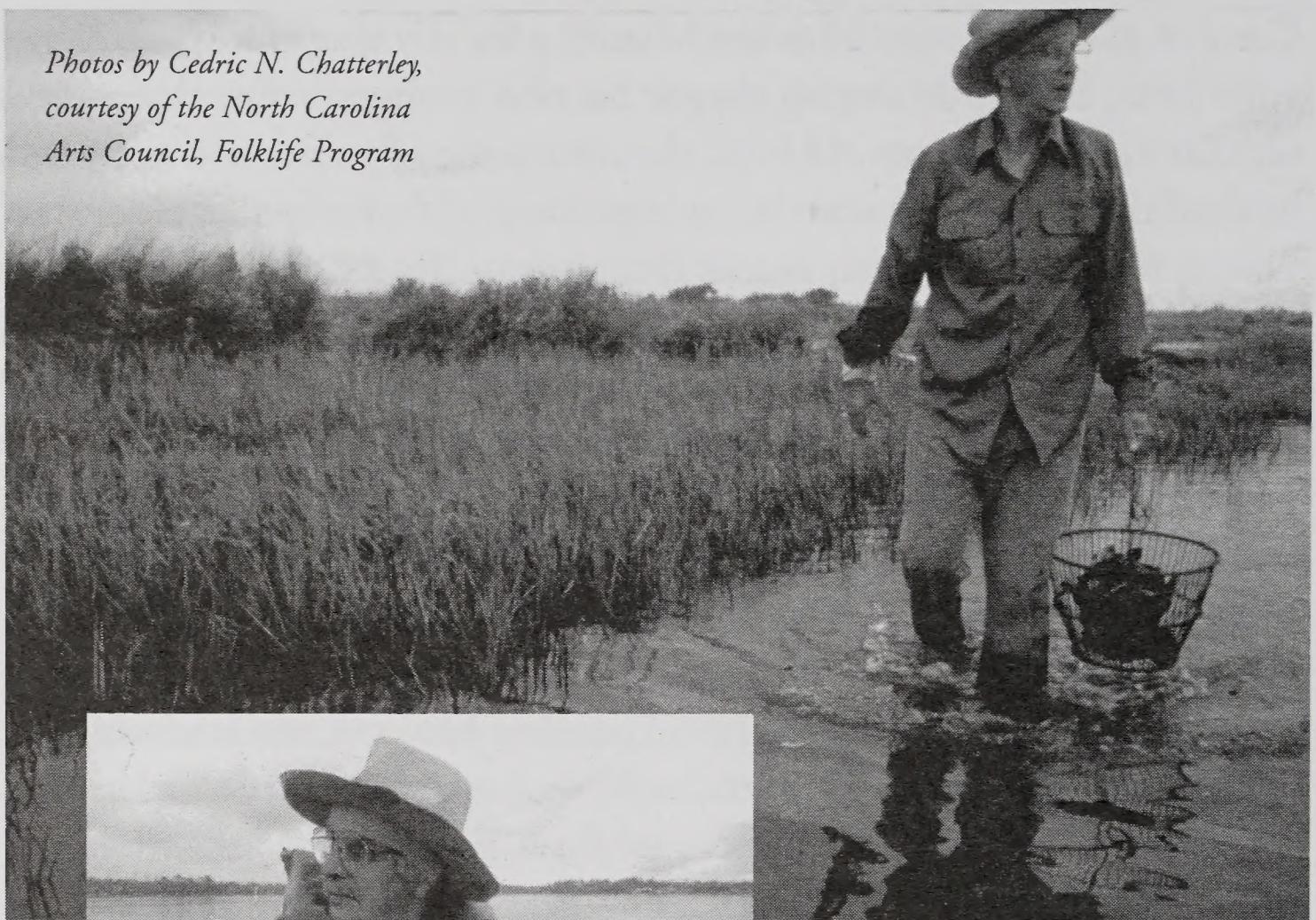


In 1965, the Mannings joined with their three daughters—Clara, Carolyn and Joyce—to form the Manning Family gospel singers. A few years later, Bishop Manning taught his two youngest sons, three-year-old Zack and four-year-old Paul, the rudiments of guitar, and soon had both of them traveling with the group. Shortly thereafter, an older son, David, filled out the group's sound on drums. By 1970, the group had recorded their first 45-rpm record, a rendition of the old spiritual, "It's Gonna Rain." Over the years they produced dozens of 45s, a handful of albums, and have recorded a number of tapes and CDs, capturing a gospel sound that blends sweet harmonies with inventive arrangements and contemporary musical stylings. Although Bishop Manning still plays with the family group, he now tends to let his children take the leads, preferring to let his musical artistry shine on feature numbers. He still plays at St. Mark every first and third Sunday, however, and leads services at the St. Mark Mission in Scotland Neck on alternate Sabbaths. He also often travels with his wife to perform at local revivals and gospel anniversary services, and has just started broadcasting his Sunday-morning services over a local cable station.

In the last few years, Bishop Manning's deeply traditional style has drawn attention from audiences far beyond his local church circuit. He has played at venues as diverse as NC State's "Spell of the Land" symposium, the Bull Durham Blues Festival (where he used the occasion to testify about leaving the blues behind him), and roots music festivals in Europe; he has also had a few solo selections released on a Music Maker CD compilation, with more soon to come. We are honored to present Bishop Dready Manning with a North Carolina Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Folklore Award.



*Photos by Cedric N. Chatterley,
courtesy of the North Carolina
Arts Council, Folklife Program*



Lena Ritter's family has worked the water and the farmland along the creeks and marshes of Stump Sound, in south Onslow County, for seven generations. This way of life is in her blood.

*Neal J. Menschell © 1991
The Christian Science Monitor,
reproduced with permission.*



Lena Ritter ~ a woman of the water

citation by *Karen Amspacher*

The history of North Carolina's coastal region has, since the beginning of its written record, been directly dependent on its natural resources. Its soil, Arthur Barlowe reported to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1584, is "the most plentifull, sweete, fruitful and wholsome of all the world," its temperate climate, its forest of "many goodly woods, filled with fruits, herbes and flowers, deere and fowle in incredible abundance," and "fish in abundance, of all sorts...herrings, trouts, porpoises, rayes, mullets...sea crabbes...oysters, some very great and some very small, some round and some of a long shape...they are found both in salt water and brackish, and those that we had out of salt water are far better than the other as in our countrey..." (Lefler and Newsome 7)

Lena Ritter understands firsthand the importance of that bounty. She has worked it all her life. Her family has worked the water and the farmland along the creeks and marshes of Stump Sound, in south Onslow County, for seven generations. This way of life is in her blood.

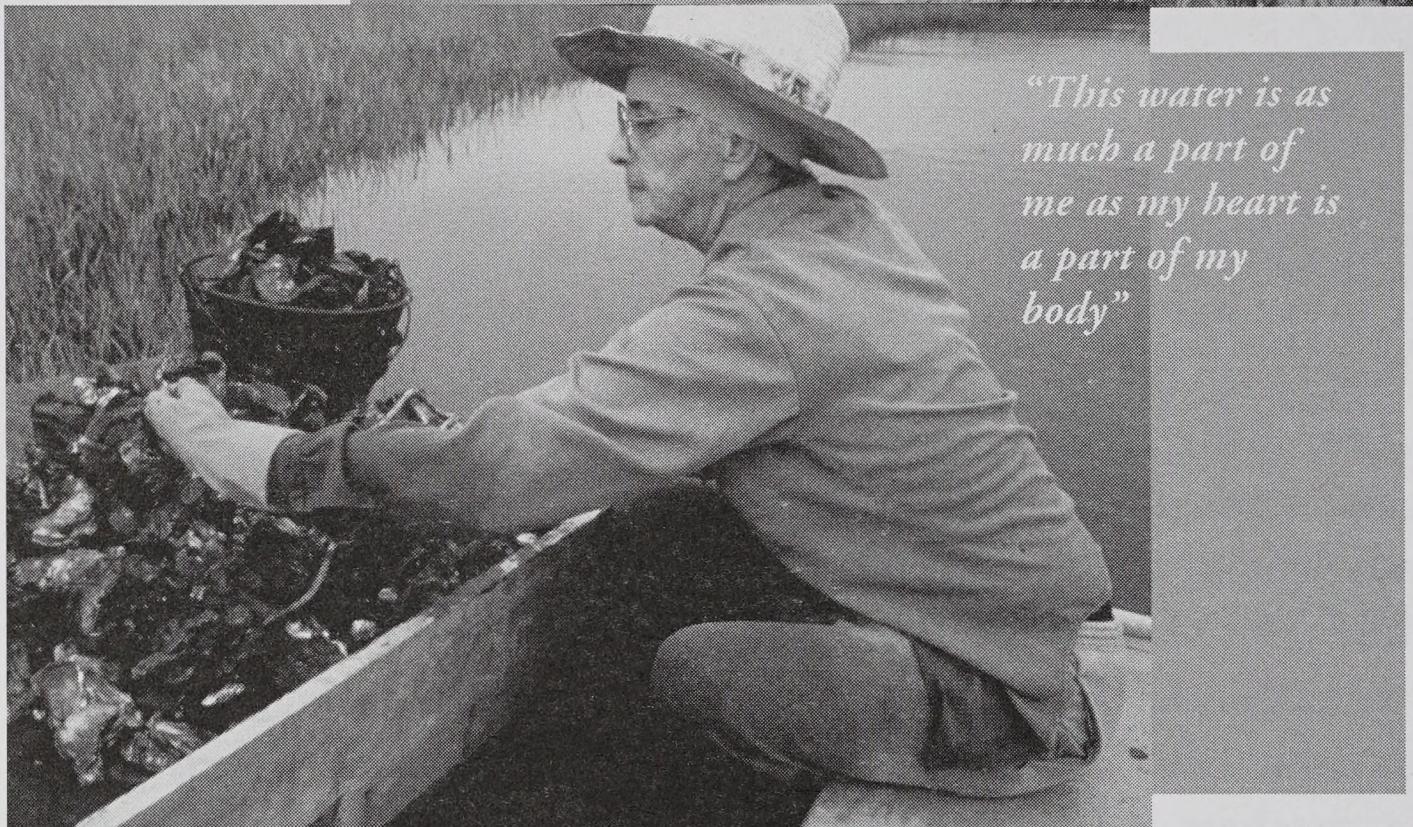
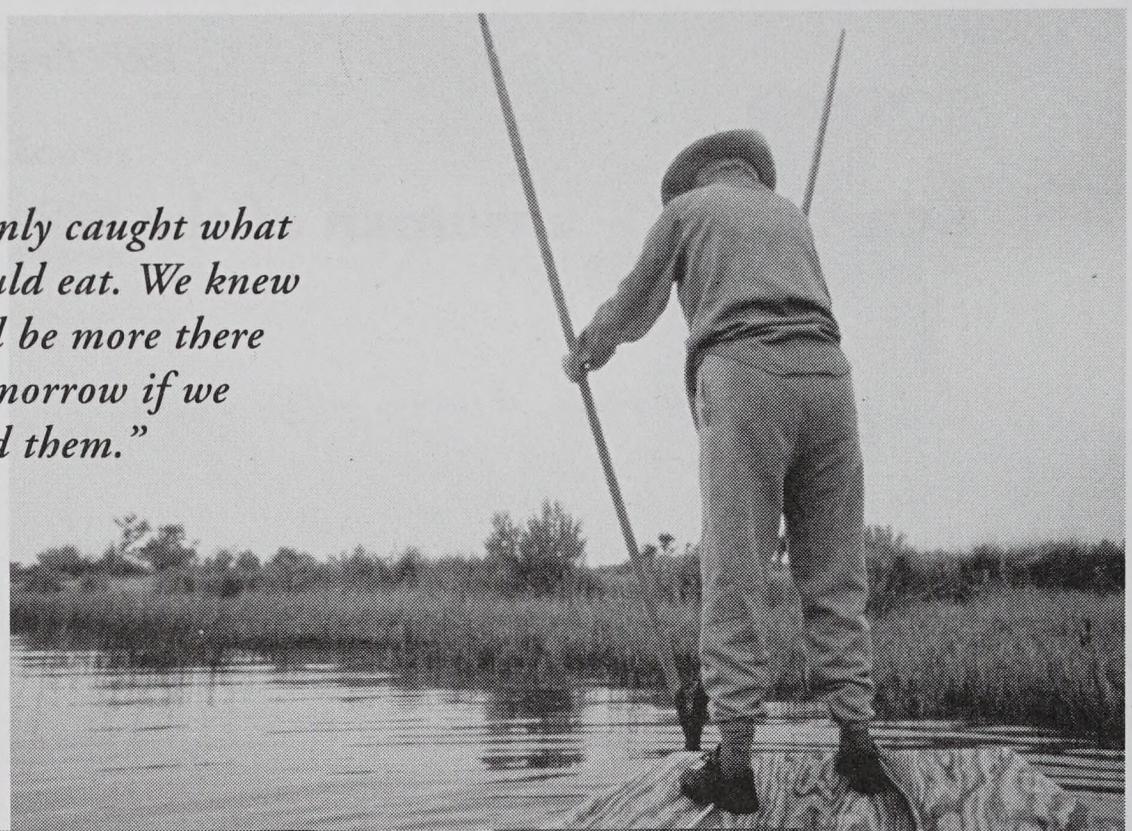
Lena Sanders Ritter was born in a fishing community. For Lena's generation, families followed the paths of their forebears. Fathers taught sons, mothers taught daughters, and families of brothers and sisters worked together to farm the land and work the water. That was Lena's inheritance, and is today her most prized possession. She says, "This is my heritage ... and it's not for sale..."

Her mother, Gertrude, was the one who worked the water because that's what her family, the Hobbses, had done for generations. Albert Hobbs and his family had an oyster business where he sold and shipped opened oysters in gallon cans to Wilmington and Goldsboro. After they were opened and the meats shipped, the shells would be put back on the oyster rock beds to bed more oysters, while other mounds of shells were burned for lime to be used as fertilizer.

All work was done responsibly and without waste. Livelihoods were hard work and men and women worked together to survive. Walnuts



"We only caught what we could eat. We knew there'd be more there for tomorrow if we needed them."

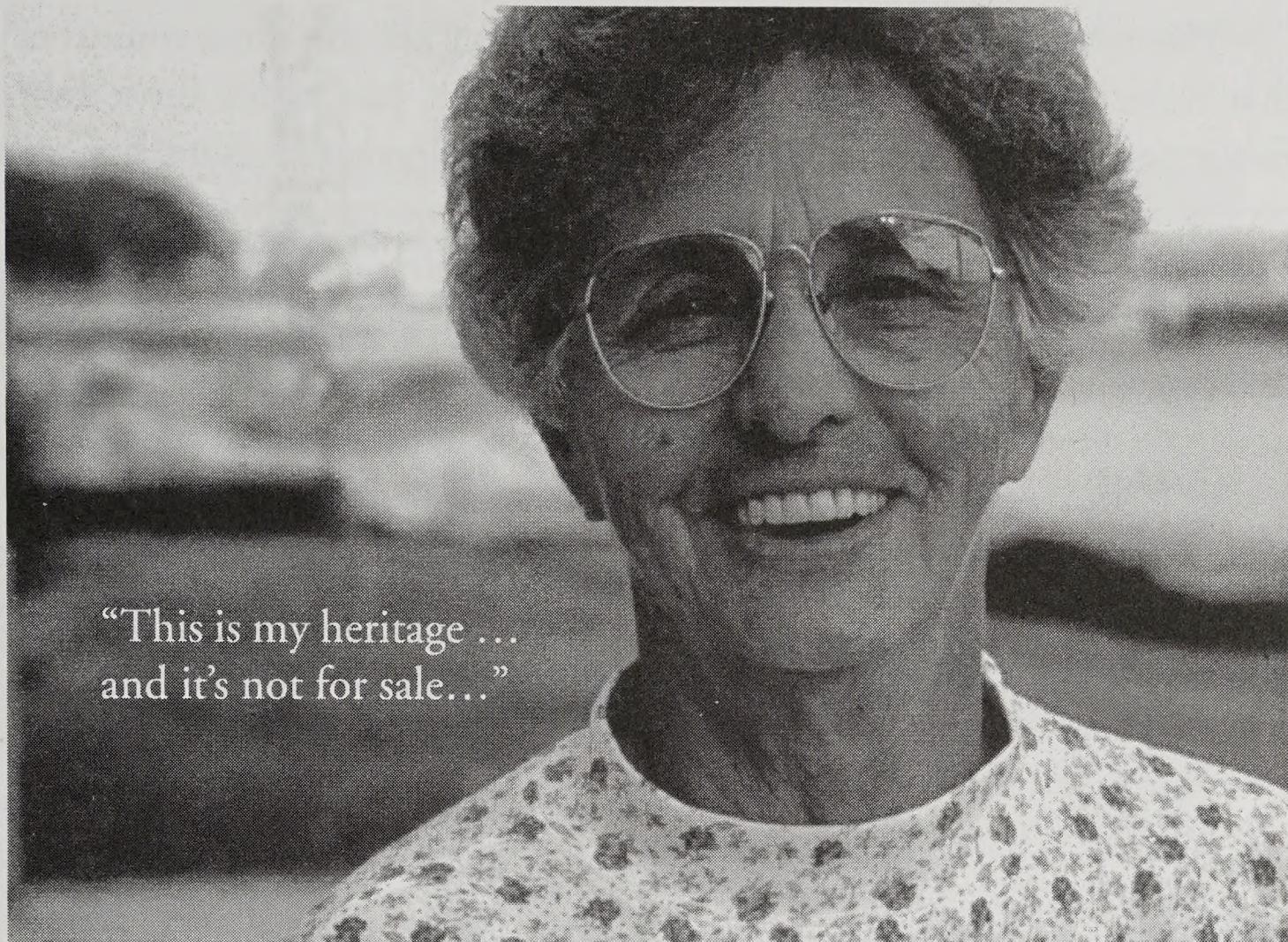


"This water is as much a part of me as my heart is a part of my body"

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Except where noted,
photos in this article
are by
Cedric N. Chatterley
and courtesy of the
North Carolina
Arts Council,
Folklife Program





"This is my heritage ...
and it's not for sale..."

were hulled, the meats sold, and the hulls boiled for dye to dip cotton nets. Dip nets for crabbing were made of old chicken wire and tobacco twine where "we'd go catch a mess for supper nights ... We only caught what we could eat. We knew there'd be more there for tomorrow if we needed them," Lena said.

Women grew strong along the water's edge. They still do. Her mother taught Lena the value of hard work as well as the skills needed. "Fingers were made for grubbing clams," Lena explains with pride and satisfaction. She is more at home in waistboots than in more "ladylike attire," for Lena is first and foremost a "woman of the water." She *is* what she does. This is Lena, as well as her heritage.

"This water is as much a part of me as my heart is a part of my body," Lena says. That is why Lena's fight to save the waters of coastal North Carolina is more than a political battle. It is not only her livelihood she seeks to protect, but her birthright. Lena has been recognized statewide for her environmental stand and her willingness to stand strong in the path of "money and progress" to protect and defend the resources that sustain her way of life and that of her family, neighbors, and community.



The resources Lena has worked to protect are the same resources that those early settlers found when they came. Just as for those first fishermen, the natural resources of coastal North Carolina sustain economic survival and cultural traditions for coastal people. This life reaches beyond daily work or food for the table; it goes deeper than marketable products of shellfish for seafood dealers. In the lives of fisherfolk, this bond with water holds them to a culture steeped in knowing and understanding the ways of the water. For families like Lena's, this knowledge is almost innate – born and bred from generation to generation.

Lena's story reflects the stories of many of North Carolina's coastal people. Her talents, skills, knowledge, and rich family traditions are not unusual. Lena's contribution to her community is demonstrated not only by her accomplishments, but also by her spirit and willingness to risk all to preserve a heritage.

Today, it is with great honor that the North Carolina Folklore Society recognizes Lena's contributions as a leader in protecting this state's rich coastal resources and for her role in preserving and protecting the cultural traditions of her community. In presenting this Brown-Hudson Award, we say "thank you, Lena" for representing all women of the water who, for generations, have stood as an integral part of the rich coastal heritage of our great state.

Lena Ritter has been a leader in protecting North Carolina's rich coastal resources as well as maintaining cultural traditions of her community.



Photo courtesy of the NC Maritime Museum

Works Cited

Lefler, Hugh Talmage, and Albert Ray Newsome. *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State.* 3rd edition. UNC Press, 1973.

Martin Bland Simpson ~ writer, musician

citation by *Jim White*

The Brown-Hudson Folklore Awards honor individuals who have contributed in special ways to the continuation, appreciation, or study of North Carolina's folklife. I am pleased to present this award to a person I can truly say continues to contribute in *each* category in *very special* ways—Bland Simpson.

Bland teaches creative writing at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and that is where we met. Though I had enjoyed the Red Clay Ramblers, an internationally acclaimed string band of which Bland is a member; I have heard it said that "Nobody notices the piano player," and that was true of me. (I apologize, Bland.) In his creative writing classes, Bland encourages students to draw on their roots, their experiences, to listen to and observe the culture so integral to the development of an individual's voice. Clearly, this is true of Bland. You hear and feel his love of people and place and especially of the people and place of his youth and ancestry, North Carolina's central and upper coast and coastal plain.

Works like *The Great Dismal: A Carolinian's Swamp Memoir* emerge from experience. His masterful blending of oral history and natural history guides the reader through the swamp with the clarity of a travel narrative and the insight of personal experience. Of course we all love a good story and Bland passes them along as well in *The Mystery of Beautiful Nell Cropsey*. In the great traditions of ballad and folktale the novel opens:

Word traveled fast in a river town with thirteen saloons. It spread with alacrity and gaining excitement through the oyster-shucking and canning houses of Elizabeth City, North Carolina. They were well into the *r* months there in November, and the 1901 oystering season was on. The hundreds of workers who spent

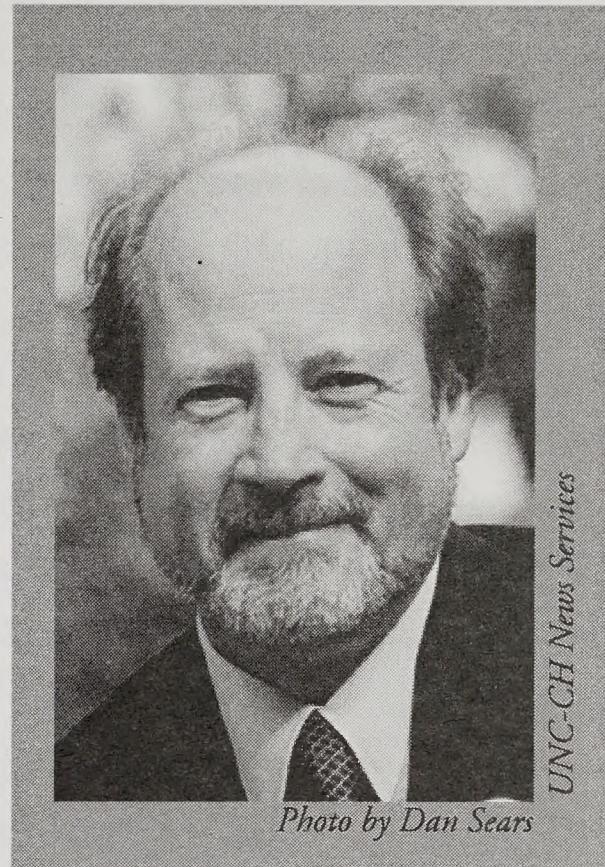


Photo by Dan Sears

UNC-CH News Services



their days with the slime and smell of a hundred-fifty-thousand gallons of oysters a season needed something to talk about there in the long frame shuckhouses built on the Pasquotank River's horseshoe bend. They talked about Nell Cropsey and Jim Wilcox.

Talk. People talk and we love to listen. Bland listens. He listens, remembers, and weaves words together to portray a cultural landscape so familiar to eastern North Carolina and the South. Sometimes real and fictional characters meet, as in *Heart of the Country: A Novel of Southern Music*. Through the eyes and ears of Preston Hewitt, we are reminded of the powerful presence of Martin Luther King. Preston also joins in a fieldwork project for the Skyliner Folk School where "As a reward for their unpaid work at the school, the young people would be given a small amount of gas and food money to finance a short trip to collect songs and stories." (This may sound familiar to some in the audience!) Bland has made a few of these short trips too. Many of the trips have been back to Pasquotank County, back to childhood days and to memories like that of his father "coming home at breakfast time with a brace of ducks from his first-light Currituck hunts." Here we enter *Into the Sound Country: A Carolinian's Coastal Plain*. (Photographs taken by his wife, Ann Cary Simpson, I might add, beautifully illustrate Bland's words.) Through family stories, historical records, and personal interviews, the reader is introduced to the vast miles of sound country. We learn of daily life, of tradition, of connection to place through name and occupation. We learn,

There is an old shipyard spot on North Landing River in upper Currituck called the Launch, another way down on Lockwood's Folly River where the name of the boat builders and that of their tiny town are one and the same; Varnum. A long stretch of coast lies between the two, and we have built in this Sound Country everything, from the log canoe to the 400-ton steamer at Styron's Shipyard in Little Washington a century ago...

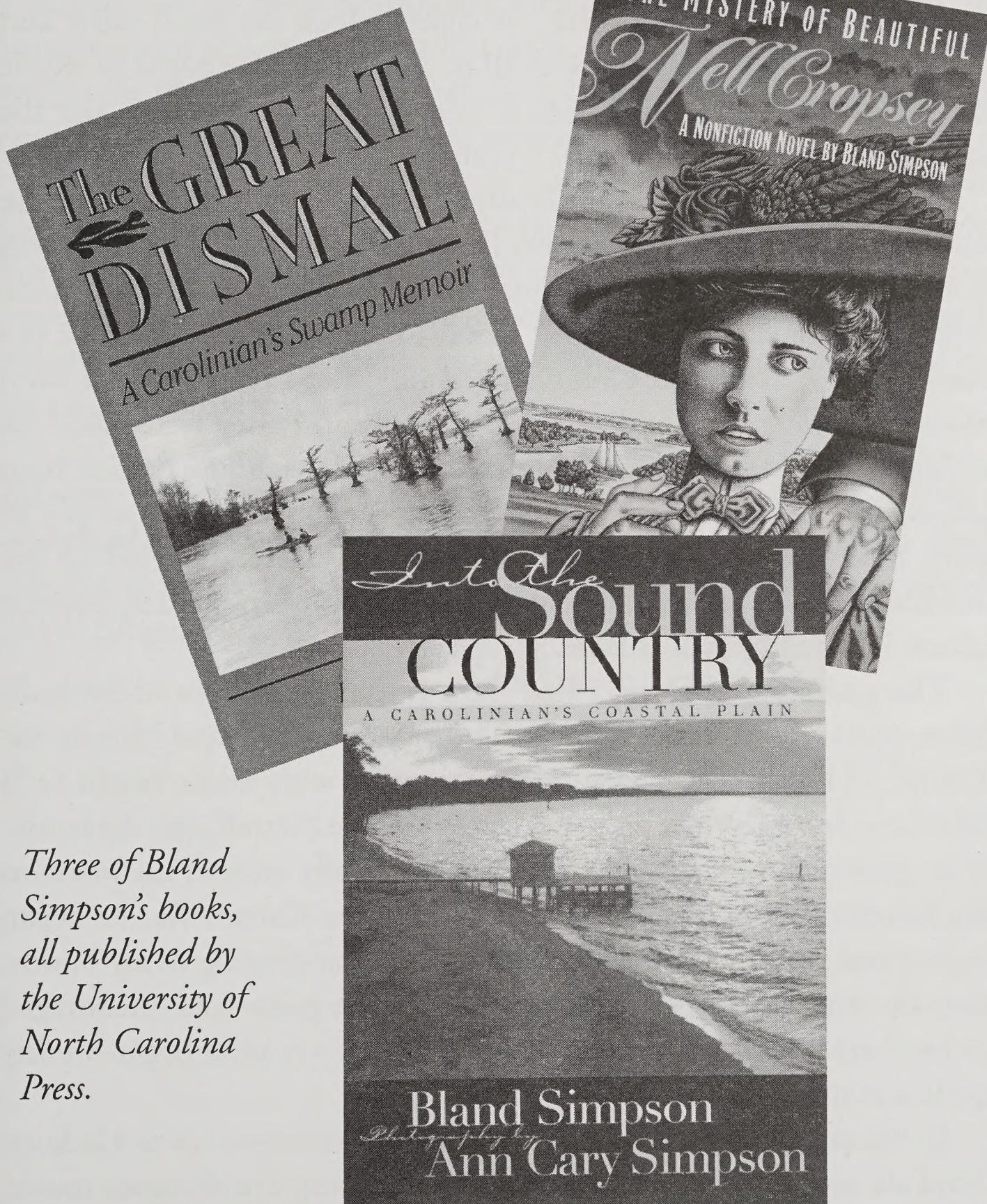
From occupations to foodways, music to material culture, *Into the Sound Country* is a study of North Carolina folklife; one that brings about a greater appreciation of the people and place of North Carolina's coastal plain.

Of course there is Bland Simpson, the musician, too. He has collaborated on the musicals *Diamond Studs*, *Kudzu*, *King Mackerel*, and more. A few weeks ago, actually, the Ides of March, I went to the



Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. for the annual Nancy Hanks Lecture sponsored by Americans for the Arts and was greeted by the familiar sounds of the Red Clay Ramblers. The Ramblers were there for the production *Fool Moon* but were providing a free concert that evening, open to the public. At that moment, I was "home," even in D.C.

Through his music and his words, Bland draws on tradition and, acknowledging change, presents the emerging traditions so that we understand from whence they come but realize that the greatest continuity is the continuity of change. Thank you Bland, for being a teller of tales, a contemporary griot.



Three of Bland Simpson's books, all published by the University of North Carolina Press.



David's Red Barn ~ community music center

citation by Bill Mansfield

Every Friday evening people head down the dirt road leading to David's Red Barn in Chowan County's Rocky Hock community. They come to perform, listen, visit, and just enjoy the homemade music and friendly atmosphere. At eight o'clock the band starts and David Harrell welcomes one and all to another Friday night of music and fellowship. People have been coming to enjoy themselves and the music at David's Red Barn for 15 years.

Gatherings like the one at David's Red Barn are found all across the country. Research by folklorist Amy Davis found that these "homegrown opries" are modeled after the country music radio programs aired in the early days of broadcasting. Shows like Nashville's Grand Ole Opry, the Louisiana Hay Ride and Chicago's National Barn Dance won a loyal following among rural audiences, in part, because they were based on traditional rural entertainment like picking sessions, house parties, barn dances, and medicine shows. These radio programs inspired people all across rural America to organize local musical events modeled on the broadcasts. It is an interesting example of folk culture inspired by popular culture inspired by folk culture.

The gathering at David's Red Barn is the result of an individual's dream and a community's support. The individual is David Harrell, the "David" of David's Red Barn. His fascination with music began as "a little teeny fellow" when he heard Uncle George Harrell play the banjo. As he grew older, David Harrell joined his family around the piano to sing favorite hymns and gospel hits. During the Korean War he began singing and playing the harmonica with a guitar-playing Army buddy. After the war, David Harrell began to pick the guitar and encouraged his brothers to take up stringed instruments. They soon began weekly music sessions in the home.

In the early 1980s, during a visit with his brother-in-law in Hickory, David ate supper at a barbecue restaurant featuring live bluegrass music.

He enjoyed the music and the family-oriented atmosphere and returned to Chowan County determined to start a similar place.

A woman donated an abandoned barn, for material, and David took it apart and moved the material to the Barn's site.

I said, I'm going to have me a barn raising. So I had a barn raising. And the honest truth, I think I counted about 60 people 'round working...[W]e put the barn up in one day. And we played music on the stage that night.

Since its completion in 1984, David's Red Barn has been enlarged to accommodate an audience that sometimes numbers one hundred. The Red Barn provides a hospitable meeting place where musicians can maintain and add to their musical skills. People come for the music as well as the chance to visit. It is reported that a couple of courtships that ended in marriage began in these weekly sessions.

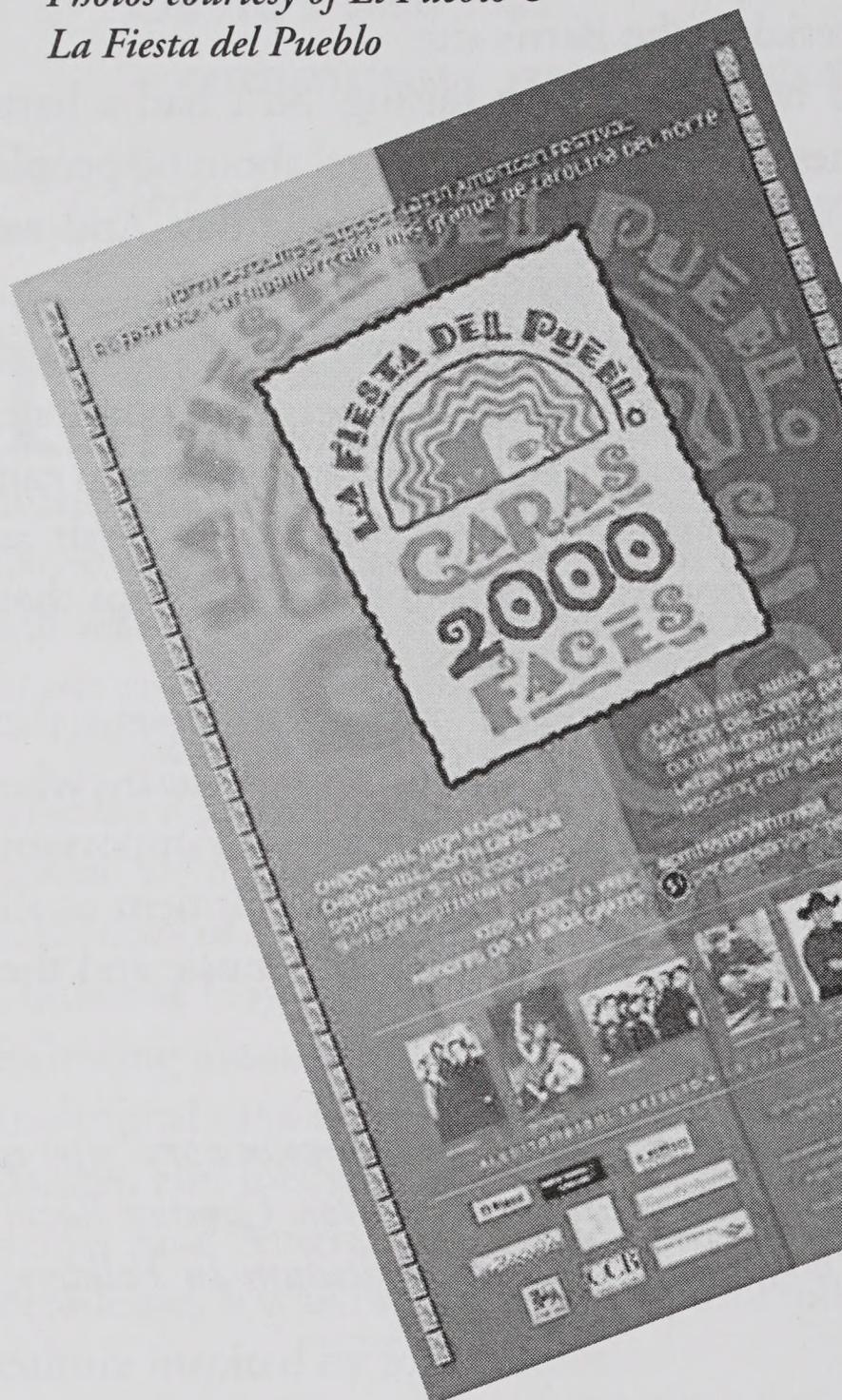
The North Carolina Folklore Society is proud to present the Community Traditions Award to the family, friends, and musicians who have made the weekly music sessions at David's Red Barn an important community tradition. It honors the efforts and the commitment of all those who maintain the homemade, community-based music and the hospitality found at David's Red Barn.

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Ed.note: Amy Davis's research and discussion of "homegrown opry" sites is contained in her unpublished master's thesis, "When You Coming Back? The Local Country-Music Opry Community," Curriculum in Folklore, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1998.



*Photos courtesy of El Pueblo &
La Fiesta del Pueblo*





El Pueblo, Inc.

citation by *Ann B. Kaplan & Sally Council*

Sally Council wished she could be here today. She said that family reunions in Fuquay are not to be missed, because family will talk about you if you're not there. She offered the following in response to my request for a story about El Pueblo and La Fiesta del Pueblo. "I've only been involved with La Fiesta in a very small way, mostly at the beginning. Even so, the stories are endless. I will tell the earliest one I know." Sally's remarks and mine are combined for this Community Traditions Award citation for El Pueblo and La Fiesta del Pueblo.

For those of us who are into symbolism, La Fiesta del Pueblo, quickly followed by its twin, El Pueblo, Inc., had a fitting birth. It was April 23, 1994, a beautiful blue-sky, cotton-cloud Carolina day, and I was sitting with Mr. Robert Bushyhead and his daughter, Jean, on the grounds of the state capitol in Raleigh. We were surrounded by the sights and sounds of North Carolina Stories, a two-day festival celebrating the opening of the new NC Museum of History. Mr. Bushyhead and Jean had just told a spellbound audience moving tales of their people, their lives, and their work to preserve the Cherokee language. They taught us how to say "we will see each other again" in Cherokee, several strong men lifted Mr. Bushyhead from the stage in his wheelchair, and we all went in search of food. But what the Bushyheads wanted more than the box dinner awaiting them was a T-shirt, like those worn by festival volunteers and staff. Volunteers were numerous, and T-shirts were scarce, but as one of the event coordinators, I managed to sneak a couple out with the dinners, and we settled in the grass to eat while they decided between the teal and the purple.

That was the moment when John Herrera and his wife, Karen Current, came running up, full of all the excitement and bright energy that anyone who knows John and Karen, or whose good fortune will lead to meeting them, soon recognizes in their presence. We could hardly get through greetings before they were announcing with youthful inspiration and enthusiasm, "We want to have a Latino festival!



Something just like this, with music and dance, language and food...and maybe soccer. Something celebrating Hispanic culture, but for everyone, not just Latinos. What do you think? Can we do it?" Again, as any friend of John and Karen will attest, the response was really not debatable: "Of course!"

Let's freeze that frame, for the symbolism is rich. On the grounds of North Carolina's capitol, two of our state's newest settlers sit with descendants of its native residents, and another whose European ancestors first began calling this landscape home a few generations back. The analogies can get excessive: John and Karen full of youthful optimism and derring-do, Mr. Bushyhead-a venerable and vibrant elder, and Jean and I, smack dab in the middle of the wonders of life and history. Around us swirls a sweet mix of expressive culture created by the remarkable peoples that have found in North Carolina their homeplace. And we have just added another fine element to its essence.

John and Karen had been incubating La Fiesta del Pueblo for some time, but in that tiny sliver of time, the idea popped out and, once public, took on a life of its own. With all the savvy of veteran festival directors, the newly initiated John and Karen, joined by other dedicated volunteers, established El Pueblo, Inc. and guided La Fiesta to maturity. Others who worked with John and Karen include Mirna and Manuel Lopez, Claudia Lopez, Jane Stein, Carmen Lucaveche, Tati and Felix Padilla, Lizette Cruz-Watko, Florence Simon, Cecilia Zapata, Sharon Mujica, Frank Gonzalez, Guillermo Arias, Alex and Sabrina Burgues, Gulnara Trauco, John and Linnette Jeffries, Michael Lopez, Victor Orellano, Rafael Orellana, Ronald French, Jim Spier, and Andrea Bazan Manson. Four short months later, the historic event opened to us all the distinctive beauty of the cultures that nurture the many Latino and Latina members of our community.

On that day in early September 1994, more than 3,000 people, both Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking, both local and from other communities throughout the state, came together on the fields and around the stages at the Lincoln Center in Chapel Hill. John Blackfeather, President of the Occoneechi band of the Saponi Nation, blessed the festival site, presented gifts of tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass to John, and officially welcomed our state's most recent immigrant community to this land.

Proceeds from subsequent festivals, under the direction of El Pueblo, the organization that grew from this vibrant beginning, have since

sponsored numerous programs and initiatives for Latinos and Latinas in North Carolina. In 1996 the festival moved to its current site at Chapel Hill High School, where last year it attracted more than 35,000 festival-goers. Once again, in opening ceremonies, Mr. Blackfeather reached across the stage and the generations with gifts of inclusion for North Carolina's newcomers.

Today it is our honor and pleasure to do the same: to welcome Latino traditions to the wonderful mix that is North Carolina folklife by presenting to our friends, the leaders of El Pueblo and La Fiesta del Pueblo, the North Carolina Folklore Society's Community Traditions Award.

Now, as time has passed since those vibrant beginnings, two of the most recognizable Latino names in the Piedmont are not those of individuals; rather they are the names of that celebrated community festival and the grassroots organization that birthed it. El Pueblo is now a thriving statewide organization whose programs are designed to aid Latinos and Latinas across North Carolina, as well as build community and understanding between this new group of citizens with profound cultural impact on North Carolina and the residents who have historically resided here.

In these few years of quick growth, La Fiesta del Pueblo has grown from producing a small grassroots community event to establishing a multi-faceted cultural festival with upwards of 35,000 participants, and El Pueblo is a statewide force in advocacy and policy, leadership development, education, and promotion of cross-cultural understanding.

From its birth in 1994 La Fiesta del Pueblo has brought together people from a multiplicity of diverse Latin American cultures to celebrate and to educate the thousands of people who attend the festival each year. La Fiesta is organized by a dedicated group of volunteers, some of whom work year-round on such activities as soccer tournaments, job and health fairs, traditional foods sold by church and community groups, cultural exhibits, children's activities, and live music from the central Piedmont, from across North Carolina and the entire Southeast, as well as from other Latin American nations.

On the vastly important front of political and social advocacy, El Pueblo, in partnership with other groups, organized the first meeting with state government officials about Latino issues and continues to meet with elected and appointed representatives and organizations to educate them about Latina and Latino concerns. They have advocated

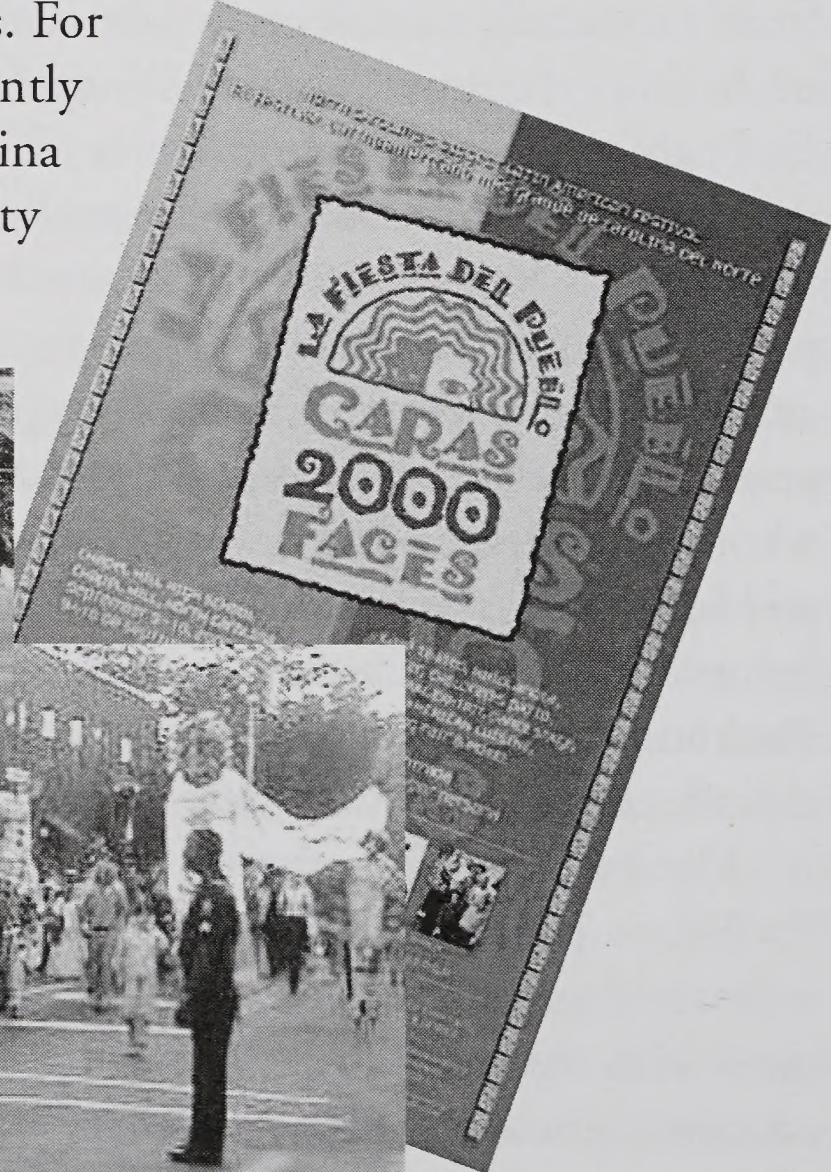


for representation in state government, creation of the Latino Advisory Council, participation in the state Human Relations Commission, and the hiring of interpreters in human and health service agencies.

In the area of leadership development, El Pueblo recognized the need for advocates for the Latino community to have an opportunity for dialogue, interaction, and a chance to meet and learn from national and state experts on Latino issues. The Latino Foro annually brings together representatives from across the state for seminars, workshops, and networking.

El Pueblo is also on the forefront of civic participation. During the 1996 elections, they collaborated with Project Vote, based in Washington, DC, to organize "Su Voto—Su Voz," the first campaign in North Carolina to register and educate the Latino community about the voting process. They continue to disseminate information and educate Latinos and Latin-friendly individuals about immigration and citizenship, and encourage Latinos to become involved in civic affairs.

In the remarkable span of its life—less than a decade—El Pueblo has made major strides in organizing and advocating for the Latinas and Latinos of North Carolina as well as in educating North Carolinians about the positive impact this new wave of immigration is having on the state's peoples and cultures. For these reasons, they are eminently deserving of the North Carolina Folklore Society's Community Traditions Award.





Emmett Parker Jones ~ wheelwright

citation by *Bill Mansfield*

Emmett Parker Jones is a fourth-generation wheelwright who traces his craft back to his great-great-grandfather. Born in Gates County in 1914, Emmett began learning the wheelwright's trade from his father, Otis B. Jones, at an early age. "I was raised in my father's shop," Emmett says. The boy was so young when he began his apprenticeship that he had to stand on a bucket while he turned his father's forge. By the time Emmett reached his teens, his father had taught him to build and repair carts and wagons and to make wheels for these vehicles, skills that demanded a mastery of woodworking and blacksmithing.

Otis Jones was an outstanding teacher. Emmett learned from him the techniques required to build a cart that would ride well and a wheel that would roll true. Of equal importance, Otis inspired his son to set high standards for his work and to think in such a way that he would always adapt his skills to accomplish the task at hand.

The themes of excellence and adaptability occur again and again throughout Emmett Jones's working life. He has gone from wheelwright to welder, aircraft technician, educator, and crafts demonstrator. Jones credits his success in such disparate jobs to the skills first learned in his father's shop.

Jones began a tradition of adapting his skills to new situations in 1937, when he and his wife, Marguerite, moved to Norfolk, Virginia, and he started to work at E.T. Gresham's construction firm. In 1944 Jones returned to North Carolina and opened a shop in Edenton where, once again, he built and repaired wagon wheels and fabricated other farm equipment until a back injury forced him to retire in 1955. Upon his recovery Jones went to work repairing aircraft at the Coast Guard Air Station in Elizabeth City, and then taught welding at Chowan County High School and at the local community college. A severe heart attack in 1978 retired him yet again.



The lessons of adaptability learned from his father's shop continued to stand Jones in good stead. After successful by-pass surgery restored his health, Marguerite suggested that he revive his wheelwright's shop. His skills had come full circle, but the clientele had changed. Innovations in agricultural technology now made carts and wagon wheels obsolete. Farmers no longer needed the skills of a wheelwright, but museums and historic sites did. Emmett found a new audience for his trade. His restored and reconstructed wagons, carts, and wagon wheels grace parks and historic sites between Florida and New York and can be found nearby at the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site and at Colonial Williamsburg. Lending his tools, his wheels, and his expertise, he helped the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City mount a popular exhibit celebrating the rural artisan's service to the farmer.

Proud of his craft and exceptionally aware of its significance, Emmett is generous with his time and expert's knowledge. He makes every effort to share his skill with anyone willing to learn. He constructed a mobile workshop in order to demonstrate the wheelwright's trade at fairs, festivals, and craft shows across Virginia and eastern North Carolina. He has tried, in vain, to find funding to support an apprentice to carry on his tradition.

Emmett is a true craftsman rather than a slave to tradition. He is quick to adapt a new tool if it will make construction easier without compromising his standards of excellence. To Emmett Jones a wheel must not only hold together and roll true but also look and sound right. He shapes the spokes and bevels the rims of a wheel so it will look "finished." He thumps a finished wheel to test its quality. A poorly made wheel will only thud, but a well made, "first class" wheel will produce a solid ringing sound.

For a lifetime of craftsmanship, for his links to tradition, for devotion to his trade, and for his commitment to excellence, the North Carolina Folklore Society commends Emmett Parker Jones with its Brown-Hudson Folklore Award. Watching Emmett Parker Jones work is a privilege. Nominating him for this honor is a pleasure.



Barry & Allen Huffman ~ folk art collectors, scholars, public advocates

citation by

Charles G. "Terry" Zug, III & Thomas McGowan

Terry: One of the largest and most enlightening presentations of North Carolina folk art is in western North Carolina, but it isn't at a conventional museum. Rooms at 330 29th Avenue Drive Northwest in Hickory offer an encounter with the bright imaginations and meaningful play of an enormous number of regional folk artists and a wide range of folk and outsider art forms. Walls, shelves, even a few ceilings, overflow with alkaline-glazed face jugs, scenes of rural life, carved walking sticks, stone angels, wooden animals and people, and fantastical paintings. Besides wondering how all this stuff is hung and dusted, visitors to the home of Barry and Allen Huffman encounter a wild mix of artistic experiences. In the words of a somewhat bewildered college mate of their son Will, the Huffman home "looks like the Smithsonian on grass."

Tom: Barry and Allen Huffman are collectors of folk art who bring important appreciations, interactions, and study that go far beyond simple acquisition. They have developed a collection that represents the range, depth, and ingenuity of North Carolina folk artists, and they have generously shared works from that collection with local and national museums. Their understanding, thoughtful study of the genres and artists, and productive acquaintance with and support of artists, museums, organizations, and folklorists fuel their love of folk arts.

Terry: Their collection began more than two decades ago when they discovered that Burlon Craig was regularly firing up his big groundhog kiln just 20 minutes south of Hickory. Since that time they have rarely missed a kiln opening. In fact, Burlon soon changed his sale day to Tuesdays, to accommodate Allen's day off from the hospital, where he would normally be delivering babies. The Huffmans quickly set out to tell others about Burlon's work, and they have done the same for the next generation of potters. In 1987 they curated a major exhibition of twentieth-century Catawba Valley pottery at the Hickory Museum of

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Art entitled "Innovations in Clay: Catawba Valley Potters." More recently, Barry has written *Catawba Clay: Contemporary Southern Face Jug Makers*, a very handsome volume that explores the revival and preservation of the Catawba Valley tradition among a surprisingly large and diverse group of younger potters. Allen was still busy delivering babies while Barry wrote this definitive study, yet he did all the photography for the book.

Tom: In 1998 Barry and Allen played a major role in establishing the Catawba Valley Pottery Festival. In North Carolina, the Seagrove potters generally get most of the limelight, and so the Huffmans decided to celebrate their local potters. To do so, they linked the Catawba County Historical Association with the North Carolina Pottery Center to sponsor the event. Several thousand people came to the first Festival, where they encountered North Carolina and Southern potters selling their wares, antique dealers with historical pieces, and a series of exhibitions and programs about North Carolina pottery. This important event is now held annually on the last weekend of March at the Hickory Metro Convention Center.

180 Each of the Huffmans has also played a major role in statewide organizations. Barry has been the main force in the activities of the North Carolina Folk Art Society, an excellent organization noted for supporting artists and advancing the knowledge and appreciation of arts and crafts in our region. She handles much of the Society's administrative logistics, doing the everyday tasks necessary to run an organization and maintain its membership, meetings, and communications. *Voices*, the Society's annual publication, owes its continuing existence and high quality to Barry's dedication, work, and vision.

Terry: Allen, for his part, served as President of the Board of the North Carolina Pottery Center through the first six years of its existence. Here Allen brought to bear all the skills of his profession, for he literally presided over the birth of this institution. He oversaw the planning of the Center (in fact, three different plans), the fundraising (he also played a prominent role on the Campaign Cabinet), and the construction. Coordinating a citizens' committee of potters and professors, lawyers and judges, and accountants and bankers was no easy task; Allen spent many of his prized Tuesdays on the phone rather than visiting folk artists.



Somehow he managed to keep this diverse group organized and moving forward, and the first state pottery center in the nation opened its doors in November of 1998.

Barry and Allen possess a true passion for folk and outsider art, but ultimately, they are most interested in the artists themselves. When cane carver Buddy Fisher's workshop burned down, they organized a fund-raising effort to help him rebuild. They nominated sculptor Raymond Coins for the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award, perhaps the first time an outsider artist has received this distinction. And more recently, Allen has made many trips to the bedside of Burlon Craig, who has been in and out of the hospital, to check on the treatment his old friend has received.

Perhaps most remarkable is the harmony of interests of this couple and their ability to work so closely with each other. When one takes the lead on a project, the other is always there too, ready to offer full support. For their unified and unwavering support of the traditional arts of North Carolina, the North Carolina Folklore Society is delighted to present the Brown-Hudson Folklore Award to Barry and Allen Huffman.

Sally Peterson

citation by *Lisa Yarger & Barbara Lau*

To get in the mood to discuss Sally Peterson's contributions to the world of North Carolina folklore, we sat down with a pot of decaffeinated coffee and a couple of slices of Molly Conrecode Singer's Better-Than-Sex chocolate cake. (Molly is a folklorist who worked with Sally for several years at the North Carolina Museum of History. Sally is an admitted chocoholic. BTSCC has not one, not two, but *three* kinds of chocolate in it.) Our conversation led us in many directions, but in the end we decided to go with our intuitions. We thought Sally would like that.

Barbara: I met Sally not long after the birth of her beloved first daughter, Julie Rose. It was 1991 and I had just started my graduate studies in folklore at UNC. I didn't know it then but Sally would become very important to me as a friend, a colleague, and an intellectual resource. She had just completed an arts needs assessment of Greensboro's Southeast Asian communities, a must-read document for anyone interested in these immigrant cultures. A year or so later when I started my own work in a Southeast Asian community, Sally generously offered advice and reassurance, often telling stories about her own experience and the process of researching and writing her dissertation, "From the Heart and the Mind: Creating Hmong Paj Ntaub in the Context of Community." Her knowledge is deep and thoughtful, her approach personal and involved. She has taught me to trust my intuition and believe in my interpretations.

In 1992 the North Carolina Museum of History decided to hire a folklorist and Sally Peterson accepted the task of bringing folklore to the curatorial table. One of her first assignments was to research and develop a permanent folklife exhibit for the museum. While this might seem an exciting prospect to most of us, it was fraught with challenges. The chosen gallery space was located just inside the main doors to the



museum—terrific; it would be a heavily visited gallery. But the Museum Associates had also designated the gallery as the site for their receptions and so all the artifacts had to be displayed in glass cases that ringed the room. Sally's solution - hang artwork from the ceilings and use video and audio to share North Carolina's rich cultural heritage.

Lisa: The folklife gallery challenges stereotypes of folk culture as quaint, old-fashioned, and moribund. Included, for example, are both the front and back halves of an old pick-up truck, not as the bucolic backdrop for a square dance scene, but as sites for the exploration of community protest traditions (in the back half) and (in the front half) the ways in which a Mexican migrant worker's dashboard can function as a home altar. Many of the artifacts in the gallery have provoked surprised (and sometimes indignant) comment cards from visitors who wonder why a gallery on North Carolina folklife features a Yamaha guitar instead of a handmade instrument from Appalachia, and why the "Christian section" features a piano and a bunch of old hymn books and fails to mention the many contributions that Christian colleges have made to the state. In her thoughtful responses, Sally notes that the gallery includes a Yamaha guitar because that's the one Creedmoor bluesman, Thomas Burt, chose to use. She patiently explains that the "Christian section" really explores faith in the home and the ways in which people express deeply held beliefs in informal, community-based ways.

Barbara: Sally has a strong belief in the power of education. As a former elementary school teacher, she has a very informed approach to folk arts in the classroom and has developed many interesting and innovative programs for teachers and students in North Carolina. I have witnessed her in action on several occasions, once in a teachers' workshop on recent immigrant communities and then again at the Museum when we hosted a seminar about family and women's folklore. In both cases she chose to foreground traditional artists, always encouraging teaching and learning styles based on respect and self-discovery. I understand Sally has played a critical role in shaping the Curriculum Music and Community Project, developed by the UNC School of Education in collaboration with the UNC Curriculum in Folklore and the Folklife Program of the North Carolina Arts Council, now in place in four western Carolina counties.



Lisa: When Sally hired me to work at the Museum in 1995, I quickly learned that she didn't have much truck with hierarchy; she told me we were a team and rolled her eyes whenever I introduced her as "my boss." Judging by her long hair and batik skirts, some folks peg her as a California hippie turned intellectual. And that would be one way to describe her. She is also a rebel with a cause. For Sally, folklore work is a radical enterprise, and you'll most often find her on the side of the underdog. Last year, a facilitator had museum staff identify something we felt passionate about in our work. One person felt passionate about decorative arts, another about teaching, and another about throwing parties (that from our event coordinator). Finally we got to Sally, who was sitting, of course, in the back of the room. Sally said: "I'm passionate about social justice."

Barbara: I remember the day Phramaha Somsak Sambimb brought the Buddha statue and altar objects to the Museum for the folklife gallery. With gloved hands, we carefully accepted and inventoried each item. When they were securely stowed in the storage area, we were hesitant to leave them. It seemed inappropriate for us to treat the Buddha this way. Once the tables, statue, umbrellas and other artifacts were installed, though, Sally engineered the Phramaha's return with several other members of the Southeast Asian community to perform a blessing ceremony for the altar and the entire exhibition. Sally Peterson's commitment to honoring community consultants and promoting understanding and respect for our state's new immigrant communities is substantial and unfailing.

Lisa: At the museum, Sally's colleagues often turn to her as an expert on multiculturalism. In that role she persists in trying to help staff understand that diversity is everyone's responsibility, not just that of the folklorist.

The thoughtfulness of her approach to folklife is evident in the award-winning exhibit, *Health and Healing Experiences in North Carolina*. A team spent three years developing the exhibit, but it was Sally who provided the conceptual framework and the vision that shaped the work. The exhibit opens with personal experience, focusing on the way people in North Carolina have dealt with their health problems, and broadens to explore a variety of traditional, popular, and institutional healing systems. From the start, Sally dared to believe that a general



audience could grasp a concept as sticky as worldview. The result is an exhibit that challenges visitors to examine Cherokee traditional healing, rootwork, and Christian healing not as products of superstitious minds, but as logical systems that give comfort and healing to many users. Because of Sally, the exhibit is as much about emotional responses as it is about intellectual choices, and the creation of the exhibit was as much a personal journey as a professional enterprise. I remember the day I walked into our office and found Sally weeping while conducting a telephone interview with a woman whose daughter had died—a woman whose story the exhibit now tells. Sally is drawn to other people's lives and narratives not so much because she is a folklorist, but because she is a *mensch*. She brings a loving heart and a very wise head to everything she does. Lucky is the young folklorist who gets to work with her.

Barbara: I think what I most admire about Sally Peterson is her ability to integrate her diverse roles in life, or as we refer to it now, multi-tasking. Sally is a mother, a partner, a colleague, a teacher, a mentor, a scholar, an agitator and a rebel, and she manages to keep all of those aspects of her self and her spirit present as she approaches whatever task is at hand. While I think this award is a bit premature, because Sally will continue to make major contributions to folklife study and presentation in the state, it is an honor to share our admiration for her with all of you now. Our presentation today is certainly not a complete summary of her accomplishments, just a stop along the way. Sally Peterson has touched the lives of her colleagues, her family, her friends, and her consultants in deep and memorable ways, and we believe she will continue to do so for the rest of her career and her life. It is with great pleasure that we honor Sally Peterson with the North Carolina Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Award.

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Induction of
Charles G. Zug, III
to the Order of the Long Leaf Pine
citation by Thomas McGowan

Charles G. Zug, III has, for over thirty years, supported the recognition and appreciation of North Carolina traditional culture in substantial ways. His research and writing, collecting and donations to museums, encouragement of folk artists and folklorists, and participation in planning projects for local and state agencies have advanced the study, development, and success of important folk artists and folk craft traditions in our state.

Mr. Zug is a nationally-recognized scholar of North Carolina pottery traditions. His work has enriched the understanding of one of our state's most notable arts traditions. Through publications, numerous talks, and personal encouragement, he has helped North Carolina potters receive national and local recognition and succeed in their art, both commercially and esthetically. His studies of our state's potters are notable for their especial regard for people and the function of pots and their making in the lives of people. That work has resulted in excellent public talks in libraries across the state; academic papers; journal articles; three exhibits at the Ackland Art Museum and others at the Weymoth Center in Southern Pines, the North Carolina Pottery Center, and the Smithsonian Institution; three excellent exhibit catalogs; entries in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* and the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*; and a true opus magnum, the University of North Carolina Press book *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina*.

One reviewer described Mr. Zug's *Turners and Burners* as telling "the story of [North Carolina folk pottery] with an all-too rare combination of solid scholarship, elegant readability, and human warmth that results from the maturation of twelve years of field and archival research, training in both English and folklore, and a concern for [that] subject bordering on obsession." The book won the 1987 Mayflower Prize of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Society and the



President's Award of the North Carolina Society of Historians. But it is not just an academic book, for it has become a mainstay in the libraries of local pottery collectors and can often be found in the studios and workshops of regional potters throughout our state.

Mr. Zug has also researched the model boat building of Harkers Island natives and the rug weaving traditions of a Davidson County family. Again, important results of his fieldwork and writing have been increased economic opportunities for folk artists, their recognition by North Carolina Folk Heritage Awards, and the continuation of important and beautiful traditions.

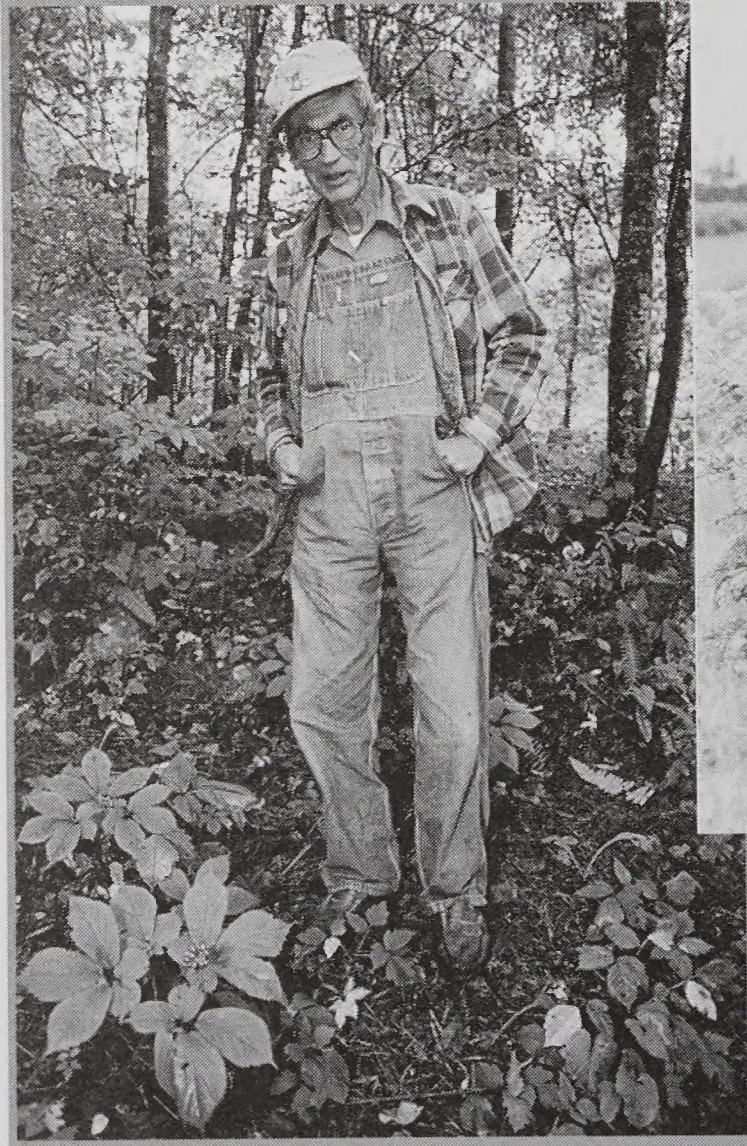
Mr. Zug is not a scholar who works alone. He began his teaching career at the University of North Carolina in 1968, administered the University's Curriculum in Folklore for the past ten years, and has worked to send students on to important academic and public sector positions in folk studies. His students have learned to love the shapes and forms of North Carolina folk artifacts, but also to discover the beautiful human values that this material culture expresses and elicits. With Dan Patterson, he edited *Arts in Earnest: North Carolina Folklife*, a Duke University book that collects student essays on a wide range of our state's special traditional arts. He also has taught regular courses on state pottery for high school teachers at Western Carolina University's North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

Mr. Zug has also done important public service where his academic credentials assisted the planning and development of significant programs featuring folk arts in North Carolina. He has served on the Cultural Resources Task Force of the Department of Cultural Resources and the Folklife Panel of the North Carolina Arts Council. He has labored long for the development of the North Carolina Pottery Center in Seagrove. His planning, advice, fundraising, collecting, and exhibition consultation have made that site a powerful folk art museum, a center for the education of all ages, and an important cultural tourism resource in the Carolina Piedmont.

For over thirty years, Charles G. Zug, III has promoted traditional arts and artists in North Carolina. Communities and individuals from the coast to the mountains have benefited from his loving work. His induction in the Order of the Long Leaf Pine is an appropriate and significant recognition of his career of teaching, scholarship, and public service.



*Three North Carolinians
featured in the
Museum of History
“Health and Healing”
exhibit: Lumbee herbalist
Mary Sue Locklear (top),
Pitt County herbalist
Emma Dupree (center),
and ginseng collector
Zelotes Peterson (below, in
a ginseng patch near his
Mitchell County home).*



*Locklear and Peterson photos courtesy
of the NC Museum of History.
Dupree photo by Mary Anne
MacDonald, courtesy of the NC Arts
Council, Folklife Program*



“Health & Healing Experiences in North Carolina”

Museum of History, Raleigh. April 24, 1998 through 2003.

reviewed by **Jack Bernhardt & Todd West**

The award-winning exhibition, “Health and Healing Experiences in North Carolina,” currently at the state’s Museum of History, is an interactive, multimedia, and multi-cultural presentation of past and contemporary beliefs and practices relating to the healing arts. The exhibit features natural, domestic, and institutional healing environments made vivid by a rich assemblage of more than 3,500 artifacts artfully displayed to convey a complex story of how North Carolinians have thought about and acted upon one of the most basic of human needs.

The exhibit is organized in three gallery areas. The first gallery surveys past and present approaches to herbal healing; the second presents a history of the state’s medical profession; and the third looks at medical practices in North Carolina today.

Visitors entering the 9,500 square foot gallery are greeted by sounds of nature emanating from a landscape that teems with medicinal plants and herbs, the foundation of ancient and modern pharmacopoeias. The path winds past a Cherokee sweat lodge, an herb garden, and an old-timey kitchen where home remedies are being prepared. In the second gallery, visitors see what life may have been like in a nineteenth century slave cabin, view the grim conditions of a Civil War hospital, and visit a 1920s drugstore. The high-tech environs of a modern intensive care unit and alternative therapies for AIDS are among displays featured in the third exhibit hall.

The architects of the exhibit, including Curator of Folklife Sally Peterson and former Curator of Community Folklife Lisa Yarger, have created a masterful display, as entertaining as it is educational. Their collaborative use of photographs, videos, taped oral histories, and narratives from healers, practitioners, and beneficiaries bring to life diverse approaches to health care practiced in North Carolina from



prehistory to the present. They also deserve credit for balancing the often conflicting and contentious views of folk medicine with those of the scientific medical establishment.

The curators have incorporated into each display interpretive panels, quotes from interviews, and taped testimonials that contextualize the exhibit and give voice to several generations of lay and professional practitioners. We learn, for example, that from 1900 until the 1960s, over-the-counter drugs in a typical pharmacy might have included Vaseline, blood wort, olive oil, belladonna, and tincture of cannabis. And we encounter different worldviews in Cherokee medicine man Hawk Littlejohn's assertion that disease results from imbalances in human relationships with the natural, spiritual, and social worlds, and in a preacher's videotaped testimony that disease finds its origin in Original Sin.

Testimonials range from the inspiring to the fantastic. Herbalist Emma Dupree, a 1992 NC Folk Heritage Award recipient from Pitt County, shares her belief in the efficacy of herbs in healing, matched by a similarly intense belief in the power of Jesus to give and to restore life and health. Mary Sue Locklear of Robeson County tells us that she packs cuts with spider webs to stop the bleeding. J. T. Carpenter of Durham County and Henry Belk of Union County both report on their belief that "if you'll smother a mole in your hand, you will be able to cure many diseases."

A display titled "Hookworm and the Lazy South" informs us that in the early 1900s hookworm infected about 40 percent of the region's population who contracted the disease by walking barefoot through warm, moist soil contaminated with animal waste. The disease often made children weak and unable to concentrate in school. "In many ways," a panel reads, "hookworm disease contributed to the stereotype of southerners as naturally stupid and lazy."

Another exhibit recounts the story of a woman called "Catherine," who reported an attack of stomach pains and feeling something moving inside her stomach. She visited a root worker who instructed her to believe in God and she would be cured. "Catherine" left the root worker's home with two quarts of an unspecified herbal mixture. "Though it gave her severe diarrhea," the text informs us, "Catherine drank all of it. Hours later, to her horror, she passed what appeared to be two wood rats. Catherine never again experienced the symptoms that led her to visit the root doctor. The movement in her stomach had stopped."



There are many informative subtexts throughout the exhibit. One echoes the activist mantra, “Think globally, act locally”: The medicinal plants in the North Carolina ecosystem that have been and continue to be used in Native American, African-American, and Anglo communities evoke awareness of the importance of preserving ecosystem diversity and integrity.

Our state’s history of racial discrimination and the differential access to medical care it provided black and white populations is dramatically disclosed in a comparison of Dr. Milton D. Quigless’s hospital room of the 1940s with the technologically sophisticated iron lungs in the Hickory Emergency Polio Hospital of the same time period. Dr. Quigless, an African-American physician who practiced in Tarboro, had no access to electronic instruments, operating with only stainless steel tools in a sparsely furnished clinic which he founded in 1947. In contrast, the costly iron lungs, which served 450 patients admitted during an outbreak of polio in 1944, were among the most advanced medical instruments in the state. Although the wards were integrated when the hospital opened, African-American patients were later moved to separate facilities.

At the Civil War hospital, the visitor can press a button and listen as patient John Adams of Wake County reads a letter to his parents in a manner and tone reminiscent of Ken Burns’s PBS documentary on the Civil War. The crude conditions of the hospital ward are shocking to those of us raised in the antiseptic world of modern medicine, and we are not surprised to learn that the soldier died from the effects of typhoid fever.

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Modern medicine is represented in part by a sterile, institutional gray hospital room equipped with oscilloscopes, electronic meters, and monitors, along with a video presentation on “telemedicine,” a sort of “distance healing” of the future, when patients and doctors will be able to communicate and interact by television from the patient’s home to the doctor’s workplace.

In an exhibit on complimentary and alternative therapies, Michael LePard, an AIDS patient, tells how he combines crystal therapy with prescription drugs. A cutout of the human body is displayed with various kinds and colors of crystals placed on the “chakra centers.” In a printed testimonial, LePard says, “I reluctantly took AZT for a short time. I was doing a lot of laying around, waiting to die. And one day, a voice inside me said, ‘There’s another way to do this.’ From that day on, I’ve been on the path that I’m on now. Basically, I took control.” Nearby, another message board asks: “How Does Michael Stay Well?” The answer: “He includes



*Hickory Emergency Polio Hospital
Photo courtesy of the March of Dimes*

*Museum is open Tuesday -Saturday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m; Sunday: 12 noon to 5 p.m.
Admission is free. Parking underground. Address: 5 East Edenton Street.
Phone: 919.715.0200. On the web: http://nchistory.dcr.state.nc.us/f_exhib.htm*

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a self-prescribed dose of AZT and 3TC (drugs that treat the HIV virus) and monitors his white cell count with regular blood tests. He also practices crystal therapy.”

The exhibit environment is user-friendly—sight lines are comfortable for children and adults. Visitors of all ages can move freely through a Cherokee sweat lodge and a Christian chapel, and stroll through the drugstore where an old-time soda fountain shares the stage with splendid oak cabinets and a dizzying array of pharmaceuticals and merchandise for sale. Finally, three “discovery centers,” interactive, walk-in areas where children and adults can enhance their museum experience, offer a personalized approach to learning through hands-on exhibits and games.

“Health and Healing Experiences in North Carolina” is a remarkable exhibition that presents diverse approaches to a most fundamental and cross-cultural concern. Through a combination of careful planning, intensive research, and collaborative relationships with an expert staff of consultant-practitioners, the museum has devised a presentation that informs and entertains while honoring the ingenuity and wisdom of generations of North Carolinians who have concerned themselves with the spiritual and physical dimensions of healing and health.



***Herbal Medicine Past and Present.* 2 volumes. John K. Crellin and Jane Philpott.** Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989; first printing in paperback, 1997. Volume I: x + 335 pp. (paper); Volume II: 550 pp. (paper).

reviewed by *Holly F. Mathews*

One of my medical school colleagues recently asked if I had ever heard of using the plant, Bethroot, for "female" or gynecological problems. I responded that I had not, but that I knew where to look for more information. I immediately reached for the two volume set, *Herbal Medicine Past and Present*, by medical historian, John K. Crellin, and botanist, Jane Philpott. This book, first published in 1989, was reissued in paperback with an updated preface in 1997. It is an indispensable reference work for anyone interested in ethnobotany and traditional medical practices.

Volume 1, *Trying to Give Ease*, documents the knowledge and practices of a single herbal healer of the southern Appalachians, A. L. Tommie Bass. The authors employed the anthropological technique of participant observation and in-depth interviewing along with approaches common to folklife studies, particularly the use of recording and efforts to distinguish oral and popular traditions, in studying Mr. Bass and his practice. The volume is divided into eight fascinating chapters which strive to contextualize the practices of this healer within broader historical and sociocultural traditions. Read in their entirety, these chapters provide a comprehensive view of the different knowledge sources about herbs upon which Bass draws, of his concepts of illness and his healing techniques, of the nature of health problems in his community, and of the types of clients he treats.

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These chapters can also be read and studied independently, depending upon individual interests, for the wealth of information they convey. For example, Chapter 1, "Medicinal Plants and their Traditions," will hold special interest for scholars of ethnobotany and medical history. It provides an in-depth review of both the plants used widely in Appalachia and the different indigenous and historical healing traditions that have influenced Bass, such as Native American herbal lore and Thomsonian botanic practice popular in the first half of the nineteenth



century. Alternatively, folklorists will be particularly intrigued by Chapter 2, "I've Always Got By," where Bass tells his lifestory. A colorful character with a rich personal history, Mr. Bass is a compelling storyteller who melds narratives of personal experience with astute commentaries on the cultural and social forces shaping his community and his own medical practices over time. Medical anthropologists and sociologists, moreover, will find the discussion of Bass's medical practices in Chapters 6 and 7 to be an important addition to the literature on comparative ethnomedical systems. These chapters include descriptions of the ailments that Bass treats most frequently, of the symptoms he views as diagnostic of each, and of the medicines he prescribes to treat them.

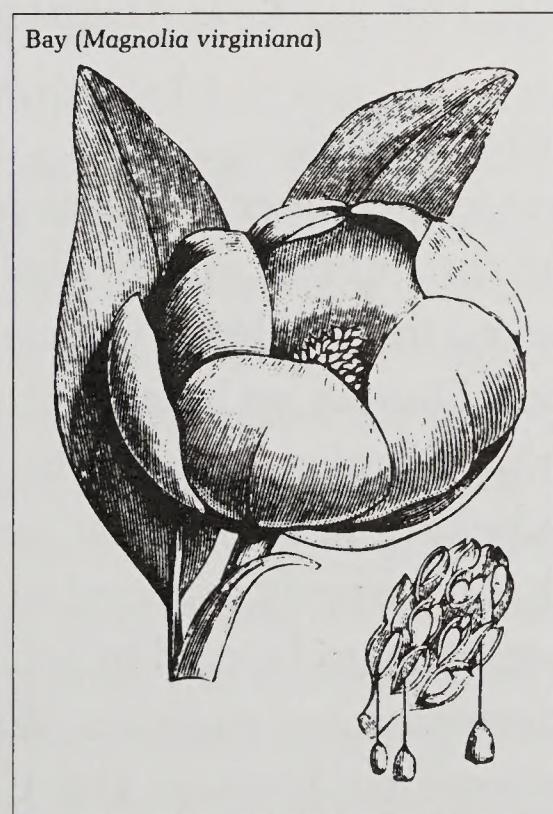
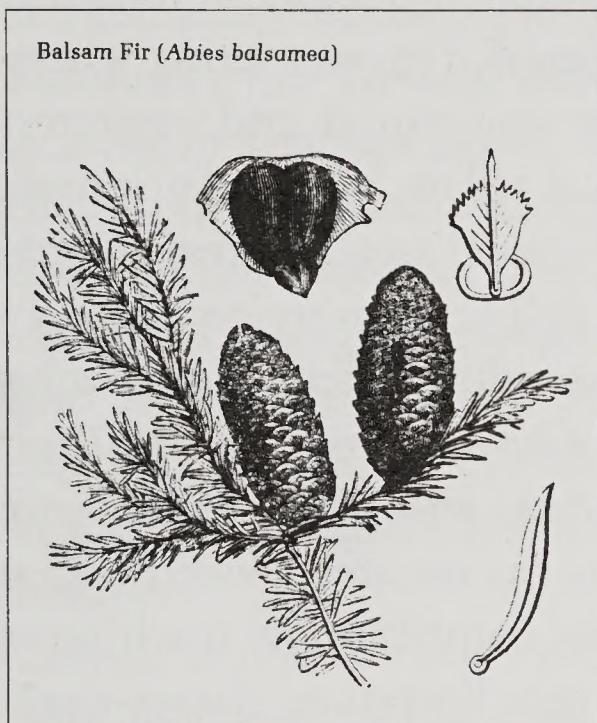
Volume 2 of this work, *A Reference Guide to Medicinal Plants*, is a compendium of information on all of the medicinal plants and on some of the nonplant remedies, such as bee products, utilized by Bass. A short monograph is presented for each plant that begins with verbatim descriptions by Bass about how he prepares and uses the plant to treat certain ailments. The authors then provide a taxonomic identification of the plant, summarize its historical uses from the literature, and compile the known information about any phytochemical constituents and physiologic effects the plant may have. References to the literature are located at the end of each monograph and an annotated bibliography of these references is included at the back of the volume.

This volume is a valuable reference tool because it summarizes, in one, easily accessible location, much of the information known about a total of 255 plants and remedies used by Mr. Bass, many of which are widely dispersed throughout the United States and have a history of use in other ethnomedical systems. While the authors' decision to list the plants alphabetically by vernacular name may seem questionable to botanists looking first for taxonomic classifications or to clinicians looking first for groupings based upon therapeutic function, the classification employed, coupled with a comprehensive index which references other known vernacular as well as taxonomic listings for the plants included, is more user friendly to a broad scholarly and lay audience.

After talking with my physician colleague, for example, I was able to locate quickly the monograph on Bethroot, a rhizome, botanically classified as *Trillium erectum L.* and known also in places as American



herb Paris, birthwort, squawroot, and nosebleed. Widely used by American Indians and Eclectic herbal practitioners in the mid-nineteenth century, Bethroot was indeed taken often for relief of menstrual complaints. I subsequently suggested that my colleague purchase this important, two-volume work so that he could learn more about the complexities of a particular healing tradition and also acquire a reference guide for researching the known uses and properties of the herbs being taken by the patients treated in his practice.



Three of the numerous illustrations of medicinal plant materials that appear in Herbal Medicine Past and Present, Volume II, A Reference Guide to Medicinal Plants

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Living Stories of the Cherokee, with stories told by Davey Arch, Robert Bushyhead, Edna Chekelelee, Marie Junaluska, Kathi Smith Littlejohn, and Freeman Owle. Collected and edited by Barbara R. Duncan. Foreword by Joyce Conseen Dugan. Chapel Hill: UNC P, 1998. Pp. xi-xv, 241, 9 black and white photos, sources, index. Hardback \$29.95, paperback \$15.95.

reviewed by *Susan Gardner*

Grace happens. It's textbook ordering time at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte: as always, while at no loss to think of contemporary literature by American Indian authors (the dilemma is an *embarrass de richesses*), I'm wondering where I can find the "ideal" text to illustrate traditional and contemporary storytelling. I'd like it to feature local tellers, please! An introduction explaining ethnopoetics and traditional oral genres in accessible terminology would be desirable, as well as an overview of the People's history. Discussion of their worldview, cultural identity, and language(s) is essential. It would also be helpful if it were fewer than 100 years old, as is the major preceding collection. As an added benefit, I'd favor a text that would add new understanding to my research concerning Lumbee elders' life histories. If it could also contribute to teaching writers with Carolina roots in contemporary literature classes—say, with western Cherokee Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear, a Novel of the Trail of Tears*, or non-Indian Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*—that would be all the better.

A book rep's nightmare, wouldn't you think?

But whoever has the good fortune to encounter Duncan's collection will understand my enthusiasm. With the approval of the Tribal Council of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee and their Cultural Officer, and the generous cooperation of the storytellers, Duncan, an independent scholar and consultant for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, who is clearly also a good friend, has provided a scholarly collection that manages to be spellbinding. Although this work is necessarily confined to the two-dimensional world of print and most likely to be read in solitude, she has skillfully recreated a sense of performance and audience. With Kathi Smith Littlejohn, we readers become students at the Cherokee



Elementary School, reveling in origin, animal, and ghost tales. We join Davey Arch indoors—in the exhibit room of the Qualla Arts and Crafts Co-Op on the reservation—and out, on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Stories about his grandparents—one a fervent Baptist, the other an expert in distilling moonshine—color biography and history with humor and reflection. The late Edna Chekelee—none of whose stories derive from those otherwise found in James Mooney's 1900 *Myths of the Cherokee*, originally a Bureau of American Ethnology report—still speaks to us, demonstrating ongoing creativity. We join the Reverend Robert Bushyhead in his study at home, where he is assisted by his daughter, Jean Bushyhead Blanton, with whom he has been developing a video as well as a computer dictionary of the Kituwah dialect, originally spoken by Cherokee in the "Middle Towns." Like the fictionalized portrait of his ancestor in Glancy's novel, he movingly exemplifies his faith in traditional and Christian heritages. Marie Junaluska translates a story well-known from Mooney, "The Origin of the Milky Way," back into the language of its original tellings: we see it transcribed both phonetically and into Sequoyah's syllabary. Freeman Owle addresses us as hikers, gathered at a club meeting in Franklin, NC, keenly aware that the town is built atop the ancestral Cherokee Nikwasi mound, and grateful for its preservation.

All their stories are told in English—only Bushyhead, Chekelee, and Junaluska grew up speaking Cherokee—and the rhythm of their speech is captivatingly "heard" through Duncan's free verse transcriptions. If the old saw about needing 10 hours to transcribe one hour of tape is true, Duncan's labor was exhausting. But what she has achieved is far more than verbatim transcription. *Living Stories* is cultural translation, and the People and their stories are alive and well. Unlike her distinguished predecessor of a century ago, she is not concerned with salvaging what is about to vanish, but with celebrating what still exists. And since these stories are told in public, in secular venues, teachers need have no qualms about incorporating them in their classes.

When some of my graduate students in an American Indian autobiography course set out to interview Lumbee elders, we bedeviled ourselves over the aesthetics and ethics of our project. There was no question of anyone speaking an aboriginal language in this instance, although Walt Wolfram and his co-workers have clearly established the



uniqueness of Lumbee dialect in English. Knowing that some readers of our transcripts would be linguists, we produced what we called a “raw, unmediated version” of each audio-taped interview, some supplemented by video recording as well. But then what? Did we have any right to alter the way our interviewees recounted their life stories? Not surprisingly, I now understand, the student who was also a poet intuitively found the best solution, probably without ever hearing of Dennis Tedlock, Dell Hymes or Henry Glassie: he rendered oral history into free verse. Just as Duncan has, he followed Glassie’s advice: “The old people talk, you run the machine, you present the tales as accurately and elegantly as you are able.... Analysis is ephemeral. Text is permanent. Just follow your heart and do what needs to be done” (24).

Now, when I reread our transcripts, with their endless sentences, non-existent paragraphs, and our amateur attempts to render gesture and cadence, I “listen” to them much as Duncan heard these stories. The Western separation of “fiction” and “non-fiction,” or distinction between individual and collective history, becomes irrelevant, as Arch’s, Bushyhead’s, and Owle’s personal narratives especially convey. I’m also somewhat abashed that, when I interviewed Freeman Owle in 1995, I couldn’t help asking him, “Are you also a poet?”, which he modestly disclaimed. He shouldn’t have. Lacking Duncan’s qualifications in ethnopoetics, I had nonetheless sensed one of her major points: “Although they are unique to each individual, personal-experience narratives are told in a stylized fashion, with a rhythm different from everyday speech” (20). And I had thought interviewing Native speakers whose first language is English would be easy! Thanks to Duncan, I can better appreciate Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham’s contention, in one of his collections of poems, that Native people speak English as a second language, even if their first and only language is English.

Until now, when elements from traditional Cherokee stories have figured in modern novels, I’ve had little recourse but to send my students to Mooney’s antiquarian text. The central character Maritole, in Glancy’s *Pushing the Bear*, invokes Selu the Corn-Mother, and asks the American soldier befriending her whether he believes in the magic lake that heals animals. *Cold Mountain* fictionalizes Mooney’s co-worker Swimmer as the hero Inman’s childhood friend, and Inman’s dying vision sends him on his final journey home, to the Shining Rock and its invisible spirits.



But now I can also send students to Duncan's book. Teachers who use Gayle Ross's or Joseph Bruchac's versions of Cherokee stories for young people will find them told again here, for audiences of any age. And I can only imagine the welcome *Living Stories* will find in courses where the concerns are anthropology, folklore, or American Indian art (for several of her interviewees are artists in several media—Arch carves wooden masks and Owle carves in stone).

The particularly helpful index, including genres, themes, and places, will assist those of us who aren't folklorists to include these stories in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Students should also enjoy comparing the individual tellers' variants of stories from Mooney's "Ur-text." For Duncan, however, these contemporary tellers are "traditional," not because of Mooney's work, but almost despite it. "[A]ll...learned how to tell stories from parents, grandparents, and the Cherokee community—at home, at family gatherings, at work, and in the course of daily life":

In these situations, much information beyond just the story is imparted, including the values of the culture, its aesthetic, and its style of telling—timing, emphasis, inflection. None of these can be learned, by even the most skilled nontraditional storyteller, from reading a story in a book. (21-2)

(Which I read as: beware the next costumed "Indian" storyteller you hear declaiming away in a shopping mall one Saturday afternoon...) So I've only one final request to my beleaguered book rep: if this ideal text just came shrink-wrapped with a companion CD...

Documenting Cultural Diversity in the Resurgent American South. Edited by Margaret R. Dittemore and Fred J. Hay. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1997. Pp. 122 + v, photographs, appendix, bibliography, notes. ISBN 0-8389-7897-5. Paperback, n.p.g.

reviewed by *Stephen Criswell*

The title of this important and informative collection of essays is a bit misleading. *Documenting Cultural Diversity in the Resurgent American South* is not a guidebook for documentation. Moreover, the cultural groups examined in the book are limited to a handful of folk groups—mostly in Louisiana and in the upper-South—which have been largely ignored by anthropologists and sociologists or, when they have been the focus of academic or media attention, have often been misrepresented. They hardly constitute a resurgent South. However, once past the title, the reader finds in the pages of this book an insightful and practical interdisciplinary examination of issues surrounding folklore and folklife documentation, particularly the role of libraries and archives, both in the preservation and in the maintenance of folklife documentation.

The essays collected in this volume are drawn from two separate conference programs sponsored by the Association of College Research Libraries. The first section of the book includes essays from the 1991 program, “Folk Cultures of the Modern South: Documentation of Living Traditions.” The second section draws from the 1993 program, “Portraits of Louisiana: Empowering People through Diversity.” While varying in focus and approach, the essays collectively are concerned with the theme of historical documentation and the construction of cultural histories and identities from within and from the outside of folk groups.

The essays in Part I discuss specific strategies for documenting and researching folklore and folklife. In the first two essays of this section folklorists Daniel and Beverly Patterson respectively discuss the importance of film and audio recording in the documentation of folklife and cultural traditions. After briefly tracing the history of folklife film documentaries, Daniel Patterson discusses the usefulness of these films—



particularly those created by collaborations between folklorists and filmmakers—for instruction and the need for libraries to acquire them. Beverly Patterson places equal importance on audio documentation. In her essay, Patterson stresses the value of sound recordings as “documents of great cultural, historical, and aesthetic importance” (30) by describing the initial indexing of the 500 commercially-produced LPs of UNC Folklore Archive. Like her co-author, Patterson urges libraries to acquire and preserve early sound recordings, which often document cultural traditions neglected by written studies.

Sociologist Elizabeth Bethel reinforces the Pattersons’ argument that the complete history of many Southern folk groups cannot be found in written documents. Bethel’s essay discusses the methodology behind her book, *Promiseland: A Century of Life in a Black Community*, particularly her study’s synthesis of oral history and the written record. Bethel gives an anecdote to stress the importance of reconciling oral and written history: Her archival research and sociological training had led Bethel to believe that the rural South Carolina community of Promiseland derived its name from the founders’ recognition of “the metaphoric parallel between their own circumstances and those of God’s Chosen people” (34). However, during one of her field interviews Bethel was soon corrected by one of the community’s lifelong residents who explained that “they named it Promised Land ‘cause they only promised to pay for it, but they never did” (34). Bethel’s subsequent examination of archived land records supported the oral explanation.

Many oral histories, like the story told to Bethel in Promiseland, can be found in the various archives of writings from the WPA-sponsored Federal Writers’ Project. In the essay, “Talk About Trouble: Documentation of Virginia Culture,” Nancy J. Martin-Perdue and Charles L. Perdue, Jr. give the history of the FWP and related projects in Virginia and describe the pitiful conditions under which the collected materials have been preserved. Scattered across Virginia and neighboring states in nineteen libraries, the materials are unorganized, not indexed, and quickly deteriorating. Martin-Perdue and Perdue have worked to save these documents and, as their essays reveals, have found in these collections “a powerful impression of the conditions of life as it was experienced by a wide array of Virginians in the 1930s and early 1940s” (45).



Moving from the Carolinas and Virginia, the second half of this book shifts its focus to Louisiana. The five essays of this section and the concluding appendix examine different folk groups in Louisiana and are linked by a common concern with correcting stereotypes, misperceptions, and ignorance.

Florence E. Borders's essay, "Afro-Louisiana Women," leads off this section with a listing of the accomplishments of Afro-Louisiana women, both slave and free, in pre-Emancipation Louisiana. An archivist at Southern University, Borders describes her on-going efforts to document the lives of notable Afro-Louisiana women through research in the libraries of historically black universities, African American research centers, art museums, church records, and notarial archives. Borders's mission is to show that "many Afro-Louisiana women have achieved against the odds...and...deserve to be remembered as more than mistresses and placees and concubines" (66). Her sentiments are echoed in the essays "Creoles of Louisiana" and "Pierre Belly and Rose," both by the late Ulysses S. Ricard. The latter is placed as an appendix to the book and recounts Ricard's family history, a history pieced together from the types of sources described by Borders in her essay. Ricard's former essay describes the accomplishments of the "Creoles of color" in New Orleans. This brief history of African Americans in New Orleans documents the "military, economic, literary, and artistic endeavors" of this group (73) and points to the usefulness of such research to "attack, directly and indirectly, racism and prejudice" (76).

The goal of eliminating prejudice and misunderstanding lies at the heart of Marcia Gaudet's research. Her essay, "The Cajuns and Their Culture," challenges the stereotypes applied to Cajuns and misunderstandings of Cajun culture often created by the media and commercial interests. Specifically, Gaudet examines the *courir de Mardi Gras*, the Cajun tradition of celebrating the days before Lent with a "Mardi Gras run." This event involves masked riders on horseback who travel through the rural countryside begging, performing, and at times engaging in mock harassment of local residents in order to acquire supplies for an evening community fete. Gaudet argues that the limited and superficial media coverage of the Cajuns and their Mardi Gras misses the subtleties of the tradition, particularly the "community focus of Mardi Gras" (82), and often leaves those outside of the culture with a



distorted view of Cajuns. To combat this problem, Gaudet urges librarians and archivists to make "accurate studies" of Cajun culture available. Irby Gaudet's photographs which accompany the article represent such accurate and objective representations.

While Cajuns are often misrepresented, the Islenos of Louisiana have been under-represented. In his essay, "Islenos of St. Bernard Parish," Isleno community leader Irvan Perez gives a brief history of these descendants of Canary Islanders who in the late seventeenth century settled in St. Bernard Parish in Louisiana. Perez describes recent efforts to preserve Isleno cultural traditions, particularly the language and music.

The essays in this collection remind folklorists that fieldwork should be balanced with library research, that archives and collections of ethnographies, written histories, transcribed interviews, government records, film and video documentaries and sound recordings are indispensable sources of information that complement, but not necessarily supersede, field research. And this work urges librarians and archivists to recognize their roles as stewards of these sources of information, to preserve and organize them and to make them available, and, more importantly, to recognize the usefulness of such collections in on-going endeavors to interpret and understand the rich cultural traditions of the American South.

Traditional Musicians of the Central Blue Ridge: Old Time, Early Country, Folk and Bluegrass Label Recording Artists, with Discographies. By Marty McGee. (Contributions to Southern Appalachian Studies, 3). Jefferson: McFarland, 2000. Pp. ix + 235, 67 photographs, bibliography, discographies, index. ISBN 0-7864-0876-6. Paperback \$25.00.

reviewed by *Lucy Allen*

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For years I have thought there needed to be more books about the rich heritage of traditional music in North Carolina. Journals such as *Old Time Herald*, *Bluegrass Unlimited*, the *Journal of Country Music*, and the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* certainly have paid tribute to many of the musicians, along with the North Carolina Folk Heritage Awards program, but most of the information is scattered. Marty McGee has provided a good start in filling the gap with his attractive book, *Traditional Musicians of the Central Blue Ridge*. While not exhaustive, it gives an excellent overview of the major musicians from this central area of the Blue Ridge—the northwestern counties of North Carolina and two counties in southwestern Virginia.

McGee provides biographical sketches and discographies for musicians and groups from Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Surry, Watauga and Wilkes counties in North Carolina, and adjacent Grayson and Carroll counties in Virginia. He limits his discussion of styles to old time and bluegrass, with occasional mentions of country and bluegrass gospel. He also limits his considerations of musicians to those who recorded on “major” labels, or on what I would call major independent labels (Folkways, Rounder, Miramac, Hay Hollar, Rebel, and County), and on early 78 rpm recordings. Thus inclusive, McGee’s musical history ranges from the 1920s, when 78 rpm recordings began to be commercially issued, to the 1990s.

Probably because they have not recorded on a major label, some musicians are mentioned only in connection with another artist. For example, Thornton and Emily Spencer do not have their own listing, but are discussed under the listing for Albert Hash. For the Spencers and a number of musicians, the index is the only way to find where they are mentioned in the book. To McGee’s credit, the index is excellent.



According to tradition, most bands stay together an average of two years and that is obvious from reading entries in *Traditional Musicians of the Central Blue Ridge*. When personnel change, frequently the band name changes, too. Keeping track of the personnel and band name changes among recording artists, traditional or popular, is a constant challenge. McGee's index helps significantly in this regard with traditional musicians from the central Blue Ridge.

McGee begins with an overview of the history of music in the area, followed by individual entries for musicians, arranged alphabetically. Stars of early 78 rpm recordings include Grayson and Whitter, Ernest V. "Pop" Stoneman, and Clarence Green. More recent musicians include Lulu Belle and Scotty Wiseman, Doc Watson, Jim Shumate, Ernest East, Benton Flippen, Kyle Creed, and Albert Hash. A younger generation of musicians includes Steve Kilby, Wayne Henderson, and Steve Lewis, just to mention a few. It is also wonderful to see that McGee has cited the North Carolina Folklore Society's double-issue of *Wiseman's View*, originally Vol. 33:1/2, now reprinted, as an important biographical source. McGee has made extensive use of his own photographs to enhance the entries, as well as reproductions of historic photographs from the Southern Folklife Collection and from many of the individual artists' collections.

Probably the most labor-intensive part of McGee's work was compiling the discographies that provide relatively complete listings of all of the recordings by each artist. Discographic research is always a challenge, but results in incredibly useful information for collectors and fans. He should be strongly commended for his work in that regard.

Traditional Musicians of the Central Blue Ridge should serve as a good reference for the musicians from the area and their recordings. I hope the roster of central Blue Ridge musicians will be expanded for future editions of the book, and that McGee's work will inspire others to write about and document in similar fashion the traditional musicians from other regions of the South.



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Richard Walser was Professor of English at NC State University. He published extensively on literature and folklore and served as coeditor of *NCFJ*. His *North Carolina Legends* is arguably the most popular publication of the state Division of Archives and History.

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Charles G. "Terry" Zug, III is former Chairman of Curriculum in Folklore and Professor of English at UNC-Chapel Hill. A citation for his induction into the prestigious Order of the Long Leaf Pine appears in this issue.

Special thanks for their assistance with this issue to:

Pam Chastain, Durham

Nick Crimi, Joyner Library, Reference, ECU, Greenville

Amy Davis, Southern Folklife Collection, UNC-Chapel Hill

Guin Harwood-Shaw, The Christian Science Monitor, Boston, MA

Juliana Hoekstra, Site Manager of Historic Stagville, Durham

Kathleen Needam, Historic Stagville, Durham

Connie Mason, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort

Greg Palmer, The Christian Science Monitor, Boston, MA

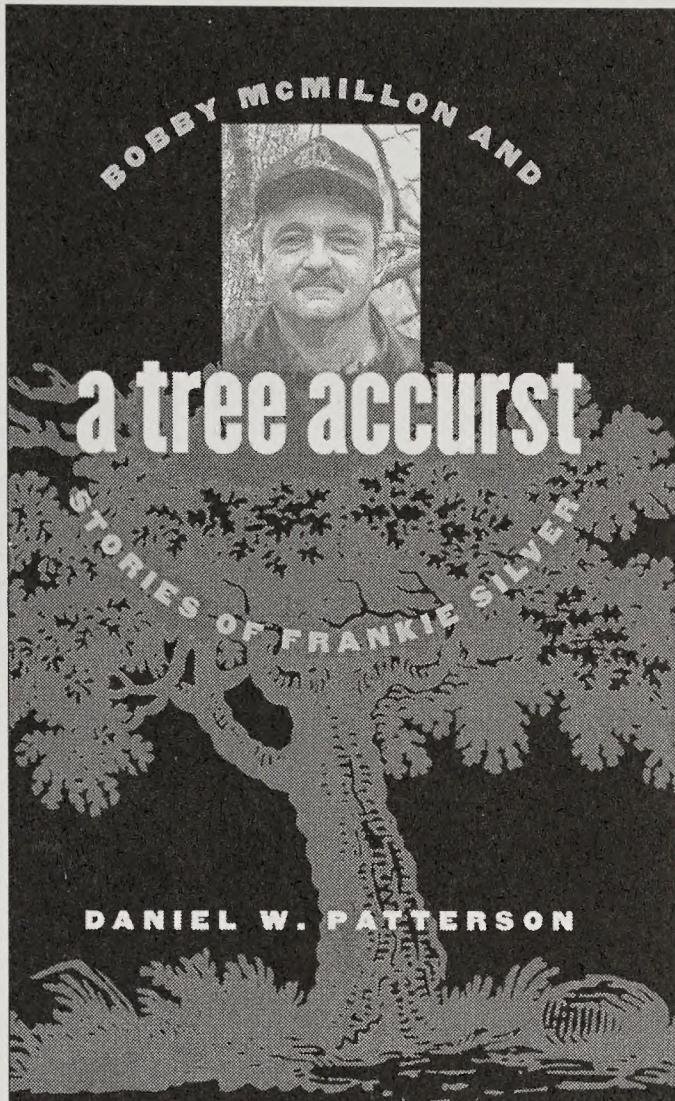
Beverly Patterson, North Carolina Arts Council, Folklife Program, Raleigh

Sally Peterson, North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh

Bland Simpson, UNC-Chapel Hill

Sally Steele, North Carolina Coastal Federation, Newport

Maury York, Joyner Library, North Carolina Collection, ECU, Greenville



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Photo by Linda Wertheim



“Black John” Liburd, retired captain of the Rawlins masquerade in Nevis, trained young men in his village up into his mid-70s. In 1996, the date this photograph was taken, Liburd commented, “You just have to keep fit!”